

**Determining A Process To Follow In Development Of Short, Medium, and  
Long Range Planning Within Auburn Fire Division  
(A Step-By-Step Process)**

Executive Leadership

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*Appendices Not Included. Please visit the Learning Resource Center on the Web at <http://www.lrc.dhs.gov/> to learn how to obtain this report in its entirety through Interlibrary Loan.*

## **ABSTRACT**

Auburn Fire Division is at a pivotal point in its development. With the retirement of the City Manager, and pending retirements of a majority of its leadership, the division will have to weather some significant changes in the immediate future. The problem is: At present, a strategic plan for the fire division does not exist that has been communicated and understood by line personnel at Auburn Fire Division. Thus, line personnel are operating without good direction, and are fragmented in their provision of service to the citizens of the community. The purpose of this research project is to discover if there is a strategic plan for the fire division and, to develop a step-by-step process to follow for developing, communicating, implementing, and continuing enhancement of short range, medium range, and long range strategic planning within Auburn Fire Division.

Action Research methodology was utilized to define and outline the process to be utilized in development, communication, implementation, and continued enhancement of a strategic plan for the fire division. The following research questions were developed and addressed in this research project:

1. What is strategic planning?
2. What is short-range, medium-range, and long-range strategic planning?
3. Who should be involved in development of a strategic plan for the fire division?

4. What basic questions should be asked when considering development of and continued enhancement of a strategic plan?
5. What specific action steps would be needed to move strategic planning forward?

Using the answers to these questions, an action plan was developed for developing, communicating, implementing, and enhancement of a strategic plan for Auburn Fire Division.

A review of literature was conducted by the researcher to explore articles related to strategic planning, especially in emergency services. This literature review encompassed fire service and management journals, applied research projects offered previously on subjects similar to and/or related to strategic planning in the fire service, review of text books related to management in general and management of emergency services, and a review of the strategic plan currently in place at the City of Auburn. The researcher also conducted interviews with the Deputy Public Safety Director – Fire Operations, the Public Safety Director, and the out-going City Manager, (December 2003), for the City of Auburn in order to determine what steps they follow in development of and continued enhancement of strategic plans. Upon the new City Manager taking office, the researcher also solicited answers to the same research questions from him. This interview process led to discovery of some of the current plans for the City of Auburn and the relationship of the fire division within the current plan. In conjunction with these interviews, a questionnaire was distributed to members of

the East Alabama Regional Training Consortium, of which Auburn Fire Division is a member, in order to determine the strategic planning processes utilized by the member organizations. Utilizing the information gathered, an Action Plan, (Appendix A – Step-By-Step Process), was developed by the researcher to be used as a guide in developing, communicating, implementing, and enhancing a strategic plan for Auburn Fire Division.

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## INTRODUCTION

Auburn Fire Division is at a pivotal point in its development. With the retirement of the City Manager, (December 2003), and pending retirements of a majority of its leadership, the division will have to weather some significant changes in the immediate future. Since the mid-to-late 1980's, in an attempt to flatten the hierarchy of command at Auburn Fire Division, and thus give a stronger voice to all employees, the levels of command (promotion), through attrition, have been reduced. Our senior officers average more than 25 years of service (Personnel Records). That may sound good, but in reality, it is not. Due to the set up of our retirement system, this researcher expects to be the only current senior-level officer, including the current Public Safety Director, still in place within the next year to eighteen months. And within thirty six months, he, too, will be eligible for retirement. More than half of all current company officer-level officers will be eligible for retirement within the next five years (Personnel Records). These retirements, coupled with our ever-increasing dependence on our Student Firefighter Program will result in a significant loss of experienced leadership in the near future at Auburn Fire Division.

The City of Auburn believes in long-range planning. According to the City's long-range plan booklet, *Auburn 2020 – Imagining a Better Community*, in 1982, the City's leaders decided to take a more systematic approach to managing municipal affairs. The result of this process was *Auburn 2000*, a plan that set forth goals, policies, and programs for encouraging and influencing positive change. Since their adoption, these goals, policies, and programs have

been used by the City's governmental officials to guide their decisions. The tangible successes resulting from this prior planning process, has encouraged the City's leaders to build upon it and extend our horizons to the year 2020. The planning process that has evolved in Auburn is essentially a systematic approach to thinking about the future, setting long range goals, and devising policies, programs, and projects that will move the City toward the fulfillment of those goals (pp 3-11).

The problem is: At present, a strategic plan does not exist that has been communicated and understood by line personnel at Auburn Fire Division. Thus, line personnel are operating without good direction, and are fragmented in their provision of service to the citizens of the community. The purpose of this research project is to discover if there is a strategic plan for the fire division and, to develop a step-by-step process to follow for developing, communicating, implementing, and continuing enhancement of short range, medium range, and long range strategic planning within Auburn Fire Division.

Action Research methodology was utilized to define and outline the process to be utilized in development, communication, implementation, and continued enhancement of a strategic plan for the fire division. The following research questions were developed and addressed in this research project:

1. What is strategic planning?
2. What is short-range, medium-range, and long-range strategic planning?
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fire division?

4. What basic questions should be asked when considering development of and continued enhancement of a strategic plan?
5. What would be the specific action steps needed to move strategic planning forward?

Using the answers to these questions, an action plan was developed for developing, communicating, implementing, and enhancement of a strategic plan for Auburn Fire Division.

### **BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE**

Auburn Fire Division is one of four divisions of the City of Auburn Department of Public Safety. The Department of Public Safety consists of the Fire Division, Police Division, Emergency Dispatch (911) Division, and Codes Enforcement Division. Auburn Fire Division is a non-union shop, consisting of 90 personnel operating in a variation of a four-platoon system from four fire stations. Auburn Fire Division is a combination division, made up of 29 Career Fire Personnel (CFP) positions, and 61 Student Fire Personnel (SFP). 25 of the CFP work a 24-hours-on /48-hours-off rotating schedule. The other 4 CFP include the Deputy Public Safety Director – Fire Operations (DPSDFO), two Administrative Captain positions (one is currently vacant), and a Training Officer who work a 40-hour workweek. The SFP are assigned to four shifts. One shift works on a 7 am until 5 pm / Monday through Friday work schedule. The other three SFP shifts work a one-day-on / two-days-off schedule from 5 pm until 7 am when their

shift falls on a Monday through Friday, and from 7 am until 7 am, (24 hours), when their rotation falls on a Saturday or Sunday.

The division serves a mostly residential community, with light industry, which serves as home to Auburn University. The area of coverage for the fire division is limited to the approximately 48 square miles comprising the city limits and the university with an automatic aid agreement in place for assistance to/from a volunteer fire department in certain areas of the city and the county to the extreme southwest of town. The population served is approximately 48,000 permanent residents with a transient/student population of approximately 27,000.

The fire division is strictly a fire prevention/suppression organization with rescue and/or extrication duties recently being re-assigned to its repertoire. The division momentarily lost rescue/extrication in the late 1980's, when EMS was contracted out to a private ambulance company. The ambulance company still has EMS responsibilities, but the fire division has re-assumed rescue and/or extrication duties. Codes Enforcement is a separate division of the Department of Public Safety, and hazardous materials response is limited to First Responder level.

Prior to 1987, the Fire Department was a combination mostly career/volunteer department, providing EMS (Paramedic Level) response, operating out of two stations. In 1986, a Fire Lieutenant filed a grievance against the Fire Chief alleging unfair hiring and promotional practices. The grievance eventually evolved into a class action lawsuit filed on behalf of the firefighters against the Fire Chief and city officials. The lawsuit was eventually settled out of

court. However, the Fire Chief retired, and a new entity – the Department of Public Safety – was created. With the creation of the Department of Public Safety, EMS was contracted out to the previously mentioned ambulance company, and the volunteer force was dissolved. The volunteer firefighter force was replaced in 1989 with a new program – the Student Firefighter Program.

The premise behind the original conception of the Student Firefighter Program was to provide a staffing source, consisting of young, energetic individuals to supplement the Career Firefighters in carrying out their duties. College students were hired as temporary full-time employees, trained to state certification levels in firefighter basics, and assigned to shifts as supplemental staffing. The SFP were offered a salary just above minimum wage upon completion of Firefighter I certification and were given the opportunity to live at the fire station free of charge. The work schedule of the SFP revolved around the individual class schedule(s). This scheduling method proved to be a logistical nightmare. Originally, there were 16 SFP slots made available, to supplement a CFP force of about 48 personnel. Through time, and evolution, the Student Program has grown to its current numbers.

Currently, SFP earn a salary just above minimum wage upon completion of Recruit School. There are two incentive pay raises built into their pay scale. At one year of service, if they achieved Driver/Operator certification, they receive an approximate 3% increase. If, after two years service, they have achieved Firefighter II certification, they receive another approximate 3% increase. Also, the fire stations are offered as places of residence for SFP. A relatively new

benefit for the students is the institution of a tuition reimbursement program built into the overall SFP program. Student Firefighters have always been required to maintain a 2.0 or greater GPA to remain in the program. Under the tuition reimbursement program, if a SFP turns in a 2.5 or greater GPA for the semester, he/she receives reimbursement for their tuition for that semester. This move has greatly increased interest in the Student Firefighter Program. Having spoken informally through the years with many of the SFP at Auburn Fire Division about why they are interested in the program, it may be surmised that more and more of the SFP candidates are not interested in the fire service at all. Rather, they are simply in the program for the tuition reimbursement. While the program has never espoused to be designed to develop firefighters, prior to the reimbursement policy, many of the SFP were interested in the fire service, and, upon graduation and assumption of their chosen profession, became volunteer firefighters in their communities. Also, prior to the institution of the reimbursement program, more SFP were involved in working toward Associate Degrees in Fire Science, and/or Paramedic certification and had chosen the fire service as a career. They simply used the program to gain experience while earning their degree/certification.

The SFP program, while tacitly accepted, is not popular with the CFP. The evolution and growth of the Student Firefighter Program has been a cause for low morale within the fire division since its inception. While most of the CFP have grown to accept the program, almost all, (CFP and SFP), would agree that the program has grown out of proportion.

Auburn Fire Division is one of the most educated fire departments in Alabama. We have more personnel with some level of college education than many fire departments in the state. This is due in large part to our Student Program, but our Career Development Guide requirements also drive us in this direction. Since the city re-vamped the promotional process at Auburn Fire Division in the early 1990's, we have consistently been able to put "smart" people on the fire ground. We are a well educated department. Unfortunately, an inherent characteristic of the Student Firefighter Program is a high turnover rate at the basic level. As students graduate, they become ineligible to remain in the program. Typically, a SFP will be in the program for two to three years. This has led Auburn Fire Division to a steady decrease in experienced personnel. Current average of time in service for SFP is approximately 22 months (Experience Levels Chart).

In 1988, the number of years in service averaged 9.5 years (Experience Levels Chart). With the inception of the SFP Program, the experience levels at AFD have steadily dropped. In 2001, the average number of years in service of all personnel at Auburn Fire Division was down to 5.7 years (Experience Levels Chart). Our senior officers average 25 years of service (Personnel Records). That may sound good, but in reality, it is not. Auburn Fire Division is a member of the Alabama State Retirement System. The Alabama State Retirement System is a 25 year retirement system with a provision for emergency workers to gain an extra year of credit for every five years of service in the system.

Including the Deputy Public Safety Director of Fire Operations (DPSDFO), there are six senior level officers' slots at Auburn Fire Division. One slot is currently vacant, due to retirement of one of our Captains in November 2002. Currently, all of the senior level officers at Auburn Fire Division, except for the one presenting this ARP, are eligible for retirement. The DPSDFO (26 yrs.) has expressed that he plans on staying for another 18 months, until his wife can retire from her job. One Captain has 30 years of service in the system, with credit equaling 36 years (December 2003). The way the retirement system is set up, this Captain will soon be 'paying' to work at the fire division. The percentage of wages he can draw in retirement will soon eclipse the percentage of wages he currently takes home. Another Captain (26 yrs.) has expressed that he is waiting on the city to fill the current Captains vacancy and the results of a currently under way job assessment consult being conducted by an outside agency at the behest of the city to decide whether or not to retire. The final senior-level officer/Captain eligible for retirement (25 yrs.) is staying "for the insurance". But, should an opportunity to leave present itself, he would take it. All of the above have added that they want to, "see what's going to happen once our new City Manager has established himself." In any case, this researcher expects to be the only current senior-level officer still in place within the next year to eighteen months.

The average number of years of service of company level officers at Auburn Fire Division is just under 15 years. (Personnel Records) With the recent retirement, (March 2004), of a Lieutenant at AFD, there are currently 15 company officer-level officers at Auburn Fire Division. There are seven other company

officers with more than 20 years in the system. Half of all current company officer-level officers will be eligible for retirement within the next five years.

In an attempt to flatten the hierarchy of command, and thus give a stronger voice to all employees, the levels of command (promotion), through attrition, have been reduced. In 1988, there was a Fire Chief, three Deputy Chief/Shift Commander positions, six Station Captains (one per station per shift), and six Lieutenants at AFD. In 1991, the Deputy Chiefs, now down to two, were made administrative officers of the division. In 1993, two Captains retired. In January 1994, in response to retirement of one of the Deputy Chiefs, the first Administrative Captains (2) were promoted at AFD. These Administrative Captains were to assist the Chief and remaining Deputy Chief with administrative duties. In 1995, the remaining Deputy Chief retired. He was replaced by a new Deputy Chief, recruited from without the division. He stayed for seven months and returned to the department from which he had come. The Deputy Chief position remained vacant for approximately 18 months and was eventually stricken from the chain of command. There are currently no Deputy Chief slots in the chain of command at AFD. There once were six Captain slots at AFD. Now there are only five, three Captain/Shift Commanders and two Administrative Captains. One of the Administrative Captain slots has been vacant for more than a year, and there has been no action taken to fill the position. There once were six Lieutenants slots at AFD. Now, there is only one. The remaining fourteen company officer level slots are filled by Team Leaders – a temporary appointment of a CFP to act as supervisor over SFP. The term ‘temporary’ is a

misnomer, in that we have some Team Leaders in place who have been Team Leaders since the early 1990's. Also, Team Leaders are now supervising CFP. There are currently only eight CFP at Auburn Fire Division that are not supervisors. The rest are SFP.

The City of Auburn believes in long-range planning. In 1980, the City of Auburn was faced internally with political and administrative confusion, and externally with declining public confidence and support. In response, the newly elected mayor initiated the Auburn 2000 Project. In 1982, the City's leaders decided to take a more systematic approach to managing municipal affairs. They organized a community-based process through which many people examined Auburn's problems and potentials, and defined programs and projects through which the problems could be solved and the potentials exploited. The result of this process was Auburn 2000, a plan that set forth goals, policies, and programs for encouraging and influencing positive change. Since their adoption, these goals, policies, and programs have been used by the City's governmental officials to guide their decisions (Auburn 2020, pg 3).

In more recent years the City's leaders established a strategic planning process which in 1995 led to the adoption of Vision and Mission Statements by the City Council. This process culminates every other year in the preparation and adoption of the City's Bi-Annual Budget. The Budget includes a five-year Capital Improvement Program and related goals (Auburn 2020, pg 5).

In Auburn 2020, the City's Planning Department estimated that the City's population would increase from 33,830 in 1990 to 40,000 in 2000. As a result of

this growth, the US Bureau of Census designated the Auburn/Opelika area, (Opelika is our neighboring city), as a Standard Metropolitan Area, consisting of these two cities and Lee County. The Department expects this (growth) trend to continue so that by 2020 the City's population could be 60,000. The tangible successes resulting from this prior planning process, has encouraged the City's leaders to build upon it and extend our horizons to the year 2020 (pg 10).

Imagining the future is easy. Imagining the future in a way that your vision has basis in reality is more difficult. Finding ways in which your vision can be translated into reality is even harder. And finding a common vision and ways to achieve it in a city in which citizens have many varied, and often conflicting, ideas is even more difficult. The planning process that has evolved in Auburn is a way to deal with these problems. It is essentially a systematic approach to thinking about the future, setting long range goals, and devising policies, programs, and projects that will move the City toward the fulfillment of those goals (Auburn 2020, pg 10).

This research paper was designed, in part, to acknowledge the failure of Auburn Fire Division to adequately involve the future leadership of the division in development, implementation, and enhancement of a strategic plan for the division. While the City of Auburn has a published strategic plan, the existence of an overall strategic plan for the fire division is unknown to this researcher. If a plan does exist, the division has failed to properly inform its members of the plan, and subsequent plans of action to accomplish its objectives. The result is a division that reacts to crises as they arise, without an overall "game-plan" to

tackle potential problems before they present themselves. Ultimately, this reactionary mode has the division in constant turmoil and uncertainty that accompany reacting to problems, instead of addressing potential problems before they manifest. The constant turmoil and uncertainty have led to a fractured approach to carrying out our business and low morale within the division. Low morale has led to complacency and lack of production. Complacency and lack of production have led to more turmoil, and the process repeats itself in a never ending cycle.

If one is informed, one is empowered. If one is empowered, one is responsible. If one is responsible, one is concerned with the outcome. If one is concerned with the outcome, one is generally more productive. If one is productive, one is successful. It all begins with being informed.

This paper was written to fulfill the applied research requirement for the Executive Leadership class as part of the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program. This research relates specifically to the Executive Leadership course in that one of the primary lessons of the course included identifying leadership qualities. Included in these qualities we look for in a leader were, among other things, the class identified the terms: visionary, inspiring, communicator, goal setter, empowerer, team builder, coach, mentor and, facilitator. To develop a good strategic plan, one must:

- Create an inspiring vision
- Build a team to achieve this vision
- Effectively communicate this vision to the team members

- Work with the team to set achievable goals and objectives
- Empower the team to accomplish the established goals and objectives
- Provide the team with the means to accomplish the goals and objectives and
- Coach/Mentor the members in how to accomplish the established goals and objectives.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

A literature review for this topic was initiated prior to this researcher leaving the National Fire Academy in April, 2003, utilizing available materials found in the on-campus Learning Resource Center.

Upon returning to Auburn, the researcher continued to review articles related to strategic planning, utilizing resources available through the internet; namely, accessing related articles in back issues of Fire Chief Magazine, Fire Engineering Magazine, and Firehouse Magazine. The researcher then cross referenced the articles found with sources found in articles and applied research papers. A review was also conducted, utilizing textbooks from previous classes on management and administration courses previously attended by the researcher. Further sources were explored, utilizing the interlibrary loan process, through the local library.

Research confirmed that the fire service today is forced to accept the philosophy of, "More with less". While this philosophy is generally employed throughout for-profit businesses, it has not traditionally been strictly applied to

emergency services. Over the last several years, there has been pressure from the public to manage government agencies in a more business-like manner and to draw from the experiences of successful organizations to manage public programs (Brown, 1996, pg 13). Public administrators today find themselves dealing with a more educated public that is more concerned with the escalating prices placed on the services that are expected. As M.J. Richter states in the July 1996 Governing Magazine article, *Reengineering Government*, "Citizens want better service from government. This demand confronts elected officials and agency managers with a challenge: they must figure out ways to boost the productivity of the financial and human resources they do have." (Richter, 1996, pg 61) This attitude of the general public has caused them to look harder at every aspect of what government, (and the public services), do. Most fire protection agencies are experiencing escalating demands for fire suppression and fire prevention services, fire safety education, emergency medical services, and hazardous materials control. However, the resources required to provide these services are limited or diminishing. With ever-shrinking budgets and demands for quality service increasing, fire service organizations must plan for the future and utilize the skills of strategic planning in management (Brown, 1996, pg 14). According to the book, *Managing Fire Services*, to adequately meet these demands, a community – with the guidance of the fire department – must take the following steps:

1. Identify the nature and extent of the risks it faces
2. Establish the levels of service desired

3. Identify the most efficient and effective use of public and private resources to provide the established service levels
4. Implement a management and evaluation system that ensures the attainment and timely revision of service level standards.

(ICMA, 1988, pg 77)

Planning is a basic step in fire protection management. Developing strategies without proper planning can have a disastrous effect on an organization, such as a fire and rescue department. Poor plans waste valuable time and generally lead to a decline in customer service (Brown, 1996, pg 1). Timely and dynamic fire protection planning provides the basis for systematic control of current and future fire risks and efficient and effective use of fire protection resources, thereby limiting fire losses and fire protection costs (ICMA, 1988, Pg 77). Planning is a continual process with features, such as feedback within the process and inputs from the environment (external risks and opportunities). An effective manager will plan in order to minimize risk while maximizing opportunities (Flood/Carson, 1988, pg 80).

Planning must be flexible; a plan that is inflexible will lead to disaster. Firms that decide to diversify must develop a strong and adaptable organizational structure to manage new activities. If the effort expended by an organizational group is to be effective, then the group members must know what they are required to achieve (Flood/Carson, 1988, pg 80). Effective planning arises most commonly from a rational systematic approach.

A plan is a course of action to be followed in the future. The term connotes purposeful, rational behavior (Ensign/Adler, 1985, pg ix). With a well educated public, savvy in political views, and seeking answers as to why certain things are done, (or not done), with access to an infinite data base from which to draw information, the administrators in public service are required to be smarter and more savvy than in times past. To simply react to what is going on around them is no longer acceptable. To be reactive is equated to being ineffective.

Planning - the creation of plans – is carried out on several levels. For fire protection, three levels might be identified: (1) long-range or master planning, (2) operational planning, and (3) tactical planning. The term “strategic plan” should be reserved for plans covering at least a 3 to 5 year period that are prepared by the chief executive officer of a corporation or the senior manager of one of it’s major operating components such as a sector, group, division, strategic business unit, or line of business. A strategic plan establishes objectives and goals for the corporation as a whole and assigns resources to its major constituent parts (Ensign/Adler, 1985, pg ix). According to the authors of the text Management and Organizational Behavior, managers must learn to plan and think strategically. “Thinking strategically involves planning a workable fit between organizational competencies and limitations on the one hand and opportunities and threats on the other. Thinking strategically means anticipating what actions are most likely to help the organization prosper under conditions of environmental change. The strategic side of management is the wisdom to know when and how to change. (Coffey, Cook, and Hunsaker, 1994, pg 444)

Long-range or master planning is concerned with evaluating and changing the fire protection system to meet needs of the changing environment. It is by nature policy-oriented, long-range in time frame, and wide in scope. It strives to confront the technical, financial, operational, legal, legislative, and political aspects of fire protection. Long-range planning emphasizes anticipating conditions rather than merely reacting to them. Long range planning must perform the following key functions: define the problem(s), identify the solution(s), and provide a scheme or plan by which to implement the solutions(s). Since fire protection is a system of independent interacting elements, effective long-range planning has a high potential for improving efficiency and effectiveness (ICMA, 1988, pg79).

Functional managers within a single line of business also plan for the future. Their plans are called "operating plans" (Ensign/Adler, 1985, pg ix). Operating plans, for the purpose of this project, will be referred to as medium-range in length. Operating plans should be derived from and consistent with the strategic plan issued by the general manager of the business. Operational planning is done to make a system work on a day to day basis. It is exemplified by organizational planning, response planning, regional incident command and mutual aid planning, capital improvements planning, and so on (ICMA, 1988, pp79-80).

Finally, tactical planning is detailed planning that focuses on achieving specific objectives (ICMA, 1988, pg 80). Tactical planning, for the purpose of this project, will be referred to as short-range in length. A "budget" is a short-term

financial plan. For many, it is their only plan (Ensign/Adler, 1985, pg x). This would appear to be the case at AFD. The current goals and objectives listed on the city's web site are limited to the current two-year budget cycle and the five-year capital improvement plan that is on-going city-wide.

Fire protection leadership in the community must make a conscious decision to embark on long-range planning. To be successful, planning efforts require a great deal of time and resources. Personnel time and some resources from other existing programs will be required to successfully complete this project. Furthermore, the climate has to be right before planning can begin, since long-range planning is not necessarily acceptable to everyone (ICMA, 1988, pg 83).

Long-range planning by its very nature requires commitment over a long period of time. Commitment is obtained through the cooperative involvement of the many community agencies that participate directly or indirectly in fire protection. Cooperation is the key to commitment. Commitment must be gained from the top down to be successful in attaining the organizational goals.

Senior management must be willing to support the strategic decisions of the CEO. One or two senior managers who disagree with the direction of the organization can cause confusion and dissent among the rank and file. It is vitally important that senior management speak with a united voice when conveying the vision and mission of the organization (Brown, 1996, pg 18).

To be successful, a plan must be understood and accepted by all who are to participate. One of the best ways to gain commitment with the rank

and file is to develop a relationship of inclusion into the planning process (Brown, 1996, abstract). When people are involved in a plan, they will identify with it, support it, and make it work (ICMA, 1988, pg 83). The objectives of the organization will only be realized by people committed to, or influenced to work toward, achieving them (Flood/Carson, 1988, pg 84).

All members of the organization are stakeholders and everyone can be involved to some degree in strategic planning. In order to be involved, they must be familiar with the vision, mission, and management philosophy of the organization, and they must believe that their ideas and input are taken seriously. They need to know where the organization is headed and stay informed concerning significant issues. The organization should not be ruled by committee, but an atmosphere where ideas can be freely expressed, with the final decisions being made by the Chief Operating Officer, should be established. The key to gaining commitment from the rank and file appears to be in communication from the top to the bottom of an organization, and vice-versa. Communicating vision, mission, and values are important; however, most employees are most apt to adopt the values of the organization if they believe and trust the leadership. Simply creating vision statements, mission statements, and lists of core values does not command compliance. Most frontline employees simply want to get honest information, without a lot of bells and whistles. They want to understand the core values of the organization, not by speeches and slogans, but by the actions of the leadership (Brown, 1996, pg 22).

It follows that commitment can best be achieved through the cooperation of all community organizations involved in fire protection. These would include the planning, building, and police departments; and in the private sector, merchants' associations, builders' associations, homeowners' groups, and industry representatives (ICMA, 1988, pg 82).

In many communities, fire protection services are considered adequate by top management and elected officials. They receive fewer complaints about fire protection than any other service, and major fire losses are infrequent. Fire department budget requests often exceed the community's ability or willingness to expend funds, raising the question of whether the department is seeking to provide a level of service greater than that desired by the community. In addition, the community frequently is unaware of the direct and indirect impacts of fire losses. The planning process can help confront such issues by (1) establishing levels of service and risk that meet the needs and expectations of the community and the fire department, (2) identifying the options and opportunities for controlling fire loss and cost within the public and private sectors, and (3) defining fire protection standards that can serve as management criteria (ICMA, 1988, pg 80).

As elected officials continuously hear the cries from their constituents for better streets, more sewer lines, more landfill space, better police protection, better response from emergency agencies, and better educational facilities, they are continuously under pressure to deliver - to deliver what the limited revenue allows (Caldwell, 2002, pg 1). Strategic planning provides the focus for decision-

making and facilitates the orderly process of moving the organization toward its goals. As programs are established or abolished, the taxpayers are concerned about the cost and levels of service. Strategic planning is one of the tools used to serve both internal and external customers. The community benefits from information-driven decisions that yield levels of service commensurate with what the public is willing to pay (Brown, 1996, pg 15).

### **PROCEDURES**

A literature review for this topic was initiated prior to this researcher leaving the National Fire Academy in April, 2003, utilizing available materials found in the on-campus Learning Resource Center. Upon returning to Auburn, the researcher continued to review articles related to Strategic Planning, utilizing resources available through the interlibrary loan process, the internet, and magazine articles in back issues of trade magazines, such as Fire Chief Magazine, Firehouse Magazine, and Fire Engineering Magazine. The researcher then cross-referenced the articles found with sources found in the articles and research papers. A review of Auburn 2020 was conducted and textbooks from management/leadership classes previously attended by the researcher were consulted. New resources were identified and procured for sources of information.

The researcher then interviewed the Deputy Public Safety Director – Fire Operations -- Larry Langley, the Public Safety Director – O. Clyde Prather, and the out-going City Manager – Douglas J. Watson, concerning their approaches to Strategic Planning. An appointment for an interview with the newly appointed

City Manager – David Watkins, concerning his approach to Strategic Planning was set up, but never completed, due to personal circumstances involving the researcher. However, the new City Manager did agree to answer the questions presented in the interview via interoffice e-mail. His answers are included in the research.

Finally, a questionnaire survey was distributed to members of the East Alabama Regional Training Consortium, of which AFD is a member, in order to determine the approaches of different departments within the region to Strategic Planning.

An action plan (Appendix A) was then developed by the researcher to be used as a guide for developing, communicating, implementing, and continued enhancement of a Strategic Plan for Auburn Fire Division.

### **Limitations**

The research was limited to establishing a check-off list of procedures to follow in developing, communicating, implementing, and enhancing an on-going Strategic Plan for Auburn Fire Division. The research is not intended to present a Strategic Plan, but, rather to establish procedures to follow in development of and continued enhancement of such a plan.

Another limitation, on a personal level for this researcher, was the death of his mother in August 2003, and the subsequent resulting actions to be taken by his family in dealing with assisting his father in caring for the researcher's adult mentally retarded sister. While a general plan has always been in place for care of this sister in such an event, implementation stumbled out of the blocks, and

adjustments to the plan had to be made. This process was exacerbated by the near death and subsequent discovery of his father having cancer in January 2004. These personal setbacks caused the project to be sidelined, at times, and may have contributed to fragmentation in presentation of the material. In any case, the researcher thanks the director of the EFOP for his patience and the extensions in deadline to present this research project.

It should also be noted that in the final stages of preparation of this research project, the senior-level officers, in an attempt to establish a plan for the division, began preparation of a document that is similar to a strategic plan for presentation to the DPSFO and Public Safety Director for consideration. The plan is time driven, in that the budget process begins in earnest after the first of the year. This is especially important, in that the budget is now a two-year budget. Thus, as a senior-level officer at Auburn Fire Division, time was taken from this research to address the very problem this paper is designed to address – lack of a strategic plan for the fire division that has been communicated and understood by line personnel at Auburn Fire Division.

## **RESULTS**

The findings indicate that planning is one of the most important functions in management of any organization. Planning is fundamental to administrative management. Organizations exist in a dynamic and complex environment in which change is endemic. Much of man's activities center around management of scarce resources and competition for finite markets. Planning thus implies the need to organize, direct, and control. Hence, planning is the primary managerial

function that precedes all others. Planning also defines a need to prepare and design an organizational structure capable of achieving those objectives (Flood/Carson, 1988, pg. 80). Planning is an integral part of achieving the organization's goals. How planning is accomplished may be the pivotal factor as to how successful the organization is at reaching those goals. The importance and many methodologies of strategic planning are contained in Module 4 of the manual for the National Fire Academy's Executive Planning course. The authors of the course state, "The fire service also is proud of its history and tradition. And fire service managers, like big business CEO's, must recognize the problems valuing history and tradition can create when they attempt to move a department into the future. What tools do they bring for dealing with the future and the changes it will bring? The tool that immediately comes to mind is planning." (NFA, 1995, SM 4-3) In this era of downsizing and reduced budgets, it is even more critical for fire service executives to employ sound planning measures in the management of their organizations. Staying focused on the vision and the missions, getting and providing information, and asking probing questions are but a few of the keys to successful planning (Brown, 1996, pg 2).

In light of ongoing budget and staffing problems, it has become apparent that Auburn Fire Division is lacking in the area of planning. No clear vision of where the division is heading has been communicated to the members of the division. The city emphasizes planning, as evidenced by Auburn 2000 and Auburn 2020 documents; however, there seems to be no one responsible for

organizational planning within the fire division. We find ourselves simply reacting to problems as they arise.

### **What is Strategic Planning?**

Strategic planning projects the performance of present and recent past into the future (Ensign/Adler, 1985, module 58). Strategic planning is planning to handle problems and opportunities which the firm will face day-in and day-out as it strives to achieve its goals and objectives (Stryker, 1986, pg xi). Strategic planning charts a direction for the firm. It does not make decisions; rather, it gives members the pertinent information to make better decisions (Stryker, 1986, pg 14). Strategic Planning involves making decisions with regard to: 1) determining the organization's mission, which includes a statement of both philosophy and purpose, 2) formulating policies to guide in establishing objectives, choosing a strategy, and implementing the chosen strategy, 3) establishing long and short term objectives to meet the organization's mission, and 4) determining the strategy or strategies to pursue in achieving the above objectives (Byars, 1984, pp38-44).

The strategic management process involves four key steps:

Step 1: Assess the current situation

An effective strategic plan requires, as a first step, the fairly rigorous collection of information. Today's decision makers need data to back up their decisions. That data should be based on sound statistical analysis. Ask the right questions, tabulate the results, and present a report to the decision makers (Caldwell, 2002, pg 1). The current situation should be assessed from several

perspectives, including the market and customers served, current or potential competitors, and internal capabilities. Understanding your market involves comprehending the demographic, economic, social, and other characteristics of your community, as well as the trends or changes that are occurring. It is also important to know about specific customer needs and expectations. Customer analysis should focus on four key questions:

1. What are the customer's priorities?
2. How satisfied are they with current services or products?
3. What are their service or quality expectations?
4. What concerns or issues do they have?

By comparing customer priorities with their satisfaction levels, it is easy to identify the services or issues they rate as top priorities or as areas of dissatisfaction. It is important to consider your position from both a cost and a quality perspective. Often, analysis focus primarily on cost issues and may miss equally important factors related to quality. A community's internal analysis should consider its resources, strengths, and weaknesses. An internal analysis should consider current workload and employee attitudes. Resources to be identified and analyzed include financial capacity, facilities, human resources, and technological advantages. The workload, in terms of current demands and projected future demand, should be analyzed. Additionally, employees' attitudes about their work environment, communication, management support, and fairness – together with their motivation and morale levels – are important to understand.

## Step 2: Make decisions and develop strategies

Two decisions must be made: What is the organization's vision? And what are its priorities? A vision establishes an organization's view of the future. It is often described as a destination point, "a place to be" in the future. A vision should be clear, concise, and easily understandable. It should be memorable and should generate commitment and enthusiasm.

The second type of decision to be made is that of determining relative priorities, as reflected in specific goals and objectives. Goals and objectives are "milestones" on the route to realizing the vision, and as such, they must be explicit, precise, and measurable. Once a vision, goals and objectives have been determined, strategies for accomplishing them should be developed. Strategies establish the basic or specific approaches to achieving the defined vision, goals, and objectives.

## Step 3: Implement the Strategies

Implementation is the point at which most strategic planning or management efforts fail. Implementation strategies must be specifically assigned, with time frames clearly defined. Oversight, to ensure accountability is also important. Community and political leaders, the CEO, and top managers must be clearly committed to the established vision and plan for successful implementation. For strategies to be implemented, goals and objectives achieved, and a vision realized, these must be clearly and specifically tied to the budget and to the budget decision-making process. The structure identifies and communicates key activities and the manner in which they will be coordinated to

achieve the organization's vision. An organization in which the vision, goals, and objectives are aligned from top to bottom will be much more successful at implementation.

#### Step 4: Measure progress

Progress can be measured in several ways. Progress can be measured by identifying changes in characteristics or trends named as strategic issues in step one. Another way to measure progress is through changes in the perspectives of your customers, for instance, improvements in levels of customer satisfaction, in perception of quality, or in perceived value received for taxes paid. Changes in competitive position also can be used as measures of progress. Changes in the effectiveness or efficiency of services provided can be used to measure progress.

Two key words in planning are focus and flexibility. Focus allows us to identify and build on what the department does as described in both the City and Department Mission and Value Statements. Flexibility indicates a commitment to address new issues and opportunities that are not identified in the plan and to expect and absorb changes in the plan as necessary. While remaining focused on the plan, we must continue to be open-minded enough to continually explore new ways to better serve our customers and protect our workforce (City of Tempe, 2001, Introduction).

According to out-going (December 2003) Auburn City Manager, Douglas J. Watson, Strategic planning is developing a strategy for dealing with the future. It's an effort to, on one hand predict the future and on the other hand – to guide

the future. We want to identify in strategic planning an outcome. Once we can agree on that vision or that outcome, then, how do we get there? That's the second part of it, that's the planning part of it. So, the strategy of reaching that outcome – that's what we are trying to do in strategic planning. The two big parts of strategic planning are: determining what the outcome is – the vision is, and what are the steps that we have to take to get there (Watson Interview, December 2003). David Watkins, Auburn's current City Manager, describes strategic planning as an organization analyzing its strengths and weaknesses, assessing threats and opportunities, and then developing a long term strategy to transform the organization into something bigger and better than it would have achieved if no key "strategic or macro-level" decisions had been made (Watkins Q&A, January 2004).

DPSDFO Larry Langley put it in more general terms. He simply stated that strategic planning is "planning for the future. The future needs of the department. The future growth of the city." (Langley Interview, March 2004)

The term "strategic plan" should be reserved for plans covering at least a 3 to 5 year period that are prepared by the chief executive officer of a corporation or the senior manager of one of it's major operating components such as a sector, group, division, strategic business unit, or line of business (Ensign/Adler, 1985, pg xi).

### **What is short-range, medium-range, and long-range strategic planning?**

Long-range or master planning is concerned with evaluating and changing the fire protection system to meet needs of the changing environment. It is by

nature policy-oriented, long-range in time frame, and wide in scope. It strives to confront the technical, financial, operational, legal, legislative, and political aspects of fire protection. Long-range planning emphasizes anticipating conditions rather than merely reacting to them. Long range planning must perform the following key functions: define the problem(s), identify the solution(s), and provide a scheme or plan by which to implement the solutions(s). Since fire protection is a system of independent interacting elements, effective long-range planning has a high potential for improving efficiency and effectiveness (ICMA, 1988, pp 79-80).

Fire protection master planning, or long-range planning, uses the techniques of systems analysis to determine the existing levels of service and risk provided by the community fire protection system and the concept of goal setting to establish the levels of service and risk desired in the future. Systems analysis has its genesis in the notion that large systems must be viewed as a whole, rather than as a number of integrated components, because these integral parts interact with a resultant effect on each other and on the system. Systems analysis can be thought of as a closed loop feedback process. The process begins with someone recognizing that a problem exists. The first thing to do is define the problem precisely. Once the problem has been defined, probable solutions can be formulated. The next step is to choose an appropriate solution. The next step is to choose an appropriate method of implementing the solution, consistent with available resources. The preferred solution is then

implemented and the results are measured by analyzing data (ICMA, 1988, pp 81-82).

Dr. Watson sees long-term as being a minimum of ten years. The City of Auburn has a Capital Improvements Program in place that project out five to six years –that's medium- range. And the short term would be limited to the two year budget (Watson Interview, December 2003). Mr. Watkins puts short-range as 3 to 5 years, medium-range as 5 to 10 years, and long-range at 10 to 20 years (Watkins Q&A, January 2004). According to Mr. Prather, short-range, for the Department of Public Safety, would be our five year Capital Development plan because we deal with that in the budget and we extend its reach every budget cycle. Medium-range would probably be ten years. Then, long-range would be the twenty year plan (Prather Interview, January 2004). DPSO Langley states that short-range, for the fire division, is what's going to happen in the next couple of years; the two-year budget plan. Medium-range is more like a five year goal. Then, long-range is ten years, but the way the city has been growing in the last ten years, the long-range goals, from what we had back in 1997 have completely changed. We constantly have to change the long-range goals (Langley Interview, March 2004).

**Who should be involved in development of a Strategic Plan for the fire division?**

The CEO is responsible for strategic planning. However, the rank and file should be involved. In order to be involved, they must be familiar with the vision, mission, and management philosophy of the organization, and they must believe

that their ideas and input are taken seriously. They need to know where the organization is headed and stay informed concerning significant issues. The organization should not be ruled by committee, but an atmosphere where ideas can be freely expressed, with the final decisions being made by the CEO, should be established (Brown, 1996, pg 16). The senior executives of an organization have a responsibility to support and assist the CEO in leading an organization. To do this, they must cooperate with each other. Strategic planning incorporates an organizations' vision for where it is heading. To guide the organization toward its goal, the senior manager must convey the corporate vision to the frontline employees (Brown, 1996, pp 10-11).

Larkin and Larkin suggest that the best way to communicate vision, values, and missions is to lead by example and to target small groups of first-line supervisors to discuss the organizations goals. The one person that most people see daily is their boss. In many cases the first-line supervisor is the one who can effectively sell change and secure commitment from employees.

Work with other agencies. Many have expertise, equipment, funds, and other resources that may help your cause, and vice versa. Community and political leaders, the CEO, and top managers must be clearly committed to the established vision and plan for successful implementation. For strategies to be implemented, goals and objectives achieved, and a vision realized, these must be clearly and specifically tied to the budget and to the budget decision-making process. The structure identifies and communicates key activities and the manner in which they will be coordinated to achieve the organization's vision. An

organization in which the vision, goals, and objectives are aligned from top to bottom will be much more successful at implementation. Communities and organizations that have committed themselves to using strategic management or similar processes have realized substantial success. Strategic management, like any other change process, requires long-term commitment from the top and much energy and effort (Bryant, 1997, pg 32).

The City of Auburn involves citizens in the process. *Auburn 2000* had and *Auburn 2020* has citizen committees, people from a wide variety of backgrounds and interests that are looking at certain aspects of Auburn – and in some detail. However, there has got to be some arbiter of recommendations. In the *2020* process that was a committee, made up of the chairpersons of each of the committees, the mayor, and a few other people. If you apply that same sort of thing within the department, you could start at any level. In a true process, you would seek input from everybody. You would get everybody involved. You would probably have some senior level group to ferret through the ideas to determine what would be pursued and what wouldn't, but, the value of getting everybody involved is a sense of involvement. And the other very good possibility is that some very good ideas will be generated, just because you are asking people to think long term - beyond the next shift. That would be within the division - the highest level. Externally, the departments that come to mind immediately are Planning, Engineering, and Water & Sewer. These are departments that would most closely interact with the fire division in strategic planning (Watson Interview, December 2003).

Mr. Watkins believes all employees should be involved in the internal strategic plan. Externally, he agrees that key stakeholders in the community (other departments, businesses, citizens groups, Chamber of Commerce, etc.) should be involved (Watkins Q & A, January 2004).

Mr. Prather broke it down further. Internally, obviously the Chief (DPSDFO) and the people he works most closely with - the Captains. In planning facilities we would probably talk with planners and architects to get an idea of cost and techniques, current techniques, that sort of thing. But, also, in the career development of our people, & looking at our promotion process we might deal with professionals that do assessment centers for promotions or that kind of thing. We work with Human Resources Management to see who potentially could be retiring over a period of time, how many promotions we might have, that sort of thing. So there are a number of internal city departments that we might work with. Outside sources, such as planners, architects, HR people that deal with promotion and career development would be consulted. (The Water Board, and Engineering would be brought in, to look at our water system and growth areas. Public works, Engineering and the Water Board, although separate, would all be involved when looking at street patterns, and sub-division development, and the need for water and the distribution system (Prather Interview, January 2004).

DPSDFO Langley said he would include his staff, down to Team Leaders. But the Team Leaders get kind of far fetched on their ideas, where the staff officers see more clearly what needs to be done, and through their experience,

more reasonable ways to approach problems. The Team Leaders see this big pie-in-the-sky - "the perfect fire department." It is difficult to get through these young officers' minds that we are not ever going to be at that level. Nobody is. The longer they are in the ranks, their expectations of where we should be, and where we are actually going to stay, they start to see things a little differently. The staff officers have been around enough to know what it takes to operate, how we are going get there, and how to convince the upper management what we need. Externally – Planning, Economic Development, and I do a lot of talking back and forth - especially with planning (Langley Interview, March 2004).

**What basic questions should be asked when considering development of and continued enhancement of a Strategic Plan?**

Obviously, the first four questions should be: Where have we come from? Where are we now? Where do we want to be? And, how do we get there from here? If you answer those four questions, you have a plan of action.

Where have we come from? When considering the future, to forget what has happened in the past will only insure that the past will repeat itself. No operation is perfect. One must learn from past mistakes in order to avoid them in the future. This would also cause us to reflect on what has worked in the past, so that it may be emulated. The past is easy to see.

Where are we now? One must take an honest look at the current status of the organization in order to determine steps necessary to move forward. If you cannot honestly look at the organization and appraise the current status, any

plans for the future will surely be skewed. You must determine what is happening now, before you can move forward.

An organization's structure determines the numbers and kinds of managers and staff required. As an initial step in the process, requirements are compared with the currently available resources in an analysis of the present and future needs. Sources, either internal or external, are identified such that the discrepancy between current resources and needs can be eliminated by recruitment, selection, and production (Flood/Carson, 1988, pg 83). You must ask the following questions: What business are we in? What are our internal strengths and weaknesses? What environmental opportunities and threats do we face? (Coffey, Cook and Hunsaker, 1994, pp 445-448) Some other questions to consider at this point would include: What are the customer's priorities? How satisfied are they with current services or products? What are their service or quality expectations? What concerns or issues do they have? (Bryant, 1997, pg 29). Honest answers to these questions will point you in the right direction to move forward.

Where do we want to be? What is the organization's vision? And what are its priorities? One of the main responsibilities of any leader is to create a vision of where you see the organization, and be able to communicate that vision to those who will make the vision into reality. In order to create a vision, you must be able to project what might happen in the future. Then you must develop solutions to either make these things happen, or prevent them from happening – depending on where and how these things will affect your vision for the future.

Sometimes, the vision must be adjusted to incorporate changes. But, with a sharp eye to the future, not many total surprises should come up that would throw you off track very easily.

It is during this step that a mission statement should begin to formulate in your mind. What is our mission? What is the purpose for this organization to exist? Why do we do what we do? To answer these questions, is to begin the planning of the department. The mission statement states why the fire service delivery system exists and provides a structure for all of the department's goals and objectives (ICMA, 1988, pp 93-94).

Once, you have established where you are and compared that to where you want to be, the obvious question is, "How do we get there from here?" That is when the plan starts to develop. Development of a plan includes defining goals and objectives that identify the purposes and results desired of the fire protection system. Goals and objectives establish the level of service to be provided to the community. The goals are policy statements of organizational purpose or intent. They describe ends toward which the department is working. Goals form the basis for fire protection "standards", which are established as objectives. Objectives are specific interim results that are expected within a given time. Objectives define the standards for fire protection and are used to measure progress toward attainment of goals. Goals and objectives should address the current status of services and outline measurable increments of change toward the desired status (ICMA, 1988, pg 92).

After goals and objectives are set, planners need to determine what programs and resources are required to attain them. Often, it is desirable to propose several possible ways to achieve a given objective. In determining objectives one must first determine the recipients of the benefits, and show how changes will have a positive effect. With each objective, you must ask yourself, if such a program feasible from an administrative standpoint. In other words, do staff and management have adequate knowledge, qualifications, and other resources to implement the new program? (Caldwell, 2002, pg 2) Another question should be, "Do staff and management have the same objectives?" Reality is mostly perception. Management may not see a problem that staff is having as a problem at all, and vice versa. Make sure you are all on the same sheet before moving forward, or you may be stumbling over each other from the beginning.

Some questions generated by the interview(s) and questionnaires included:

Where do we want to be? What's it going to look like? Just forget everything – all the limitations you can think of; all the reasons it won't happen – clear all of that out of your brain and just sit back and imagine – What's this place going to look like? Another thing is, once you do a strategic plan it's not set forever. You have to review it. Then, you have to ask: When we put this thing together, this is what we thought. This is what we have accomplished since then. This is what we didn't accomplish that we said we wanted to accomplish. Let's go through them and check them off. Are we doing it, or are we not doing it?

We need to step back and assess what else has developed? What's happening now? What are we going to see in the next ten to 15 years? (Watson Interview, December 2003)

Who will implement the plan? What are the specific action plans? How do we know when we have achieved success? Do we have the resources to implement? How do we communicate goals to your internal and external stakeholders? (Watkins Q & A, January 2004)

How much of this (growth) area can we cover with existing facilities and equipment? At what point would we know we are going to hit the trigger for an additional station? Is our current staffing and equipment adequate to serve now? When in the future are we going to need more of these kinds of things? What are ISO criteria? (Prather Interview, January 2004)

How much manpower will the stations need? What equipment is going to be required for the area? What response zones are the personnel at that station going to have to respond to? What is the perfect location for the station? Can we purchase the property to put it in the area needed? If you're in a residential neighborhood you have to stop and look how that station is going to affect that neighborhood. Can we safely respond emergency in that neighborhood? Would emergency response, (in residential neighborhoods), generate complaints about the noise, and safety of children playing? Would you want to consider a non-emergency response, safety-wise, because of the kids, until you are clear of the neighborhood? (Langley Interview, March 2004)

## **What specific action steps would be needed to move Strategic Planning forward?**

The decision to develop a fire protection plan should be outlined in a written proposal and presented to top management within the community. A formal written proposal should be developed for adoption by the elected governing body after it has been approved by top management (ICMA, 1988, pp 83-85).

The initial step is to collect and analyze data to determine the risks and problems. Data should be developed that identify the current and future fire protection risks, service demands, fire protection capabilities, financial requirements and revenues, and legal constraints. The accuracy and thoroughness of the plan to be developed will depend on the quality of the data collected. It is important that the data be accurate and quantifiable. The data required will probably fall into six general categories: demographic, geographic and physical, building and occupancy, organizational and functional, financial, and legislative and legal. Subsequent analysis and planning cannot proceed without data on what has happened, what is happening, and what will probably happen (ICMA, 1988, pp 86-87).

The next major step is to define goals and objectives that identify the purposes and results desired of the fire protection system. Goals and objectives establish the level of service to be provided to the community. The goals are policy statements of organizational purpose or intent. They describe ends toward which the department is working. Goals form the basis for fire protection

“standards”, which are established as objectives. Objectives are specific interim results that are expected within a given time. Objectives define the standards for fire protection and are used to measure progress toward attainment of goals. Goals and objectives should address the current status of services and outline measurable increments of change toward the desired status (ICMA, 1988, pp 92-93)

The goals and objectives that come out of the planning process need to relate directly to the mission of the organization. The mission statement states why the fire service delivery system exists and provides a structure for all of the department’s goals and objectives. After goals and objectives are set, planners need to determine what programs and resources are required to attain them. Often, it is desirable to propose several possible ways to achieve a given objective. The planning team then analyzes the alternatives that have been identified and selects the ones that members believe will work best as components of the fire protection system (ICMA, 1988, pp 93-95).

The next step is preparation of a planning document, using the programs selected. Following creation of the plan document, the plan must be approved by the governing body. After approval, the managers of the various departments and community agencies implement the plan. An integral part of implementation is evaluating the results. The plan should be designed to respond to changing conditions in the community. It should be modified if projected or unexpected changes occur that affect the fire protection system or if the programs are not

producing the desired results. These plan updates should become a part of ongoing management activities (ICMA, 1988, pp 97-98).

You must gain support from the Council, OCM, DPS, Fire chief, and Shift Commanders (Watkins Q & A, January 2004). Working together as a team. Presenting the plan (Langley Interview, March 2004).

## **DISCUSSION**

Planning must be incorporated at all levels of any governmental organization. The bottom line is that the public demands quality service at a reasonable cost. Fire departments are not immune to criticism from the public and should be exploring ways to improve processes and cut costs where possible, or to justify costs when necessary.

Strategic planning is a tool for identifying the right things to do, focusing a community or organization on those things, measuring progress, and continually adjusting plans and strategies to achieve a community's or organization's vision. A good strategic plan will lead to maximum efficiency and will benefit the community.

Those at the top of the organization must shape the vision and define the mission. Vision incorporates current realities with expected future conditions to create an image of the desired future. Strategic planning must focus attention on an organization's performance and purpose. A level of quality should be established for every aspect of performance, and the leadership should set an example for their subordinates. Employees' attitudes about their work

environment, communication, management support, and fairness – together with their motivation and morale levels – are important to understand.

A systematic step-by-step approach is necessary for strategic planning (Anonymous, Small Business Report, March 1983, pp 28-32). The first step is to assess the current situation. This requires collection of reliable data to support the decision(s) that will be made in the planning process. You have to identify who your customers are, both internal and external, and determine what they want – in terms of quality of service, levels of service, and costs of service. Then, you have to assess your current capabilities, and how they relate to what the customer expects. Based on this information, you must determine what is needed to meet the expectations, and future expectations of the customers.

Once this is done, a vision of where you want the fire division to be must be created. This vision must be communicated to all who will be affected by the vision. This includes those responsible for making the vision a reality and those who will benefit from the vision becoming a reality. Based on the vision – the big picture – goals must be developed in order to create stepping stones toward achievement of the vision. In other words, if we do this, then this will happen, etc. Once goals have been established, objectives must be determined. Objectives are the smaller steps to achieve goals, which, in turn, work toward achieving the vision. The strategies employed to achieve goals and objectives lead to making the vision a reality.

The next step is Implementation. Unfortunately, this is the point at which most strategic planning efforts fail. Implementation strategies must be

specifically assigned, with time frames clearly defined. Oversight, to ensure accountability is also important. The community, political leaders, and top managers must be clearly committed to the established vision and plan for successful implementation. You cannot forget the budget process. Once all the standards of service are laid out, and the strategies and plans are developed, funding must be secured. Without funding, the plan is futile. An organization in which the vision, goals, and objectives are aligned from top to bottom will be much more successful at implementation.

Finally, you must be able to measure progress. If you fail to measure progress, how do you know if the program is succeeding, or not? Quantifiable measures, benchmarks if you will, must be established to determine if we are still on target. And, if we are on target, are we accomplishing what we wanted to accomplish? And, if we are accomplishing what we wanted to accomplish, does it fit into our established goals, objectives, and vision? If not, is that a bad thing – or should we adjust our goals, objectives, and/or vision?

We must remain focused on the plan, yet flexible enough to adjust the plan to meet the ever-changing environment in which we operate. Focus allows us to identify and build on what the fire division does as described in the City, the Public Safety Department, and the Fire Division Mission and Value Statements. Flexibility indicates a commitment to address new issues and opportunities that are not identified in the plan and is integrated into the plan in anticipation of and to absorb changes in the plan as necessary. While remaining focused on the

plan, we must continue to be open-minded enough to continually explore new ways to better serve our customers and protect our workforce.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The City of Auburn believes in long-range planning. Due to this belief, the city has committed to long-range planning for the city - *Auburn 2000* and *Auburn 2020: Imagining a Better Future*. The planning process that has evolved in Auburn is essentially a systematic approach to thinking about the future, setting long range goals, and devising policies, programs, and projects that will move the City toward the fulfillment of those goals. The Department of Public Safety has a loose plan in place to address their part in the future plans for the city. However, this involvement is limited to the five-year Capital Outlay Plan and the two-year budget, with little projection beyond those documents. At present, a strategic plan does not exist for the fire division that has been communicated and understood by the line personnel. Thus, line personnel are operating without good direction, and are fragmented in their provision of service to the citizens of the community. This is ultimately causing the quality of service provided to the citizens to decline.

Auburn Fire Division needs to take a more proactive role in determining our future. At present, we are simply reacting to crises as they occur. In order to take a more proactive role, we need to develop and implement a strategic plan, designed to address probable situations that we may expect to encounter.

The Deputy Public Safety Director – Fire Operations has got to establish a “vision” of where the division should be in the future.

- This vision can reach five, ten, fifteen, twenty, or more years. The time line isn’t what is important, here. The thing that is important is development of a vision.

After a vision has been established, by the DPSDFO, the real work begins.

- First, he has to research what the visions of the City and the Public Safety Department (PSD) are for the division.
- He then has to determine where we currently are in achievement of these “visions”.
- He also has to play some catch-up.

How do the visions of the City and PSD for the fire division line up with his vision for the fire division?

Should he craft the vision to meet the visions of the City and PSD, or should he redirect these administrators to adapt their vision to better integrate with his vision?

- Once the vision has been established, he must take a look at where his vision fits in with the current Mission Statement for the fire division. Does the current Mission Statement accurately depict what the fire division’s purpose is? If not, he may wish to change the Mission Statement to more accurately reflect what the fire division actually does, or what he wants it to do. Or, he may wish to change what the fire division

does, to better align with the current Mission Statement for the fire division.

- Once the vision and mission have been established, it is time to present them to those who are expected to do the “leg work” in accomplishing the mission and bringing the vision to realization. This is where the DPSD has got to sell the vision to his subordinates and the strategic planning becomes a team effort. The team should consist of, at least the senior-level officers of the division, but may include more subordinate officers, if the DPSD desires. It is recommended that any personnel who can, and are willing to contribute to the success of developing the plan be included, from the earliest point at which they can affect the process.

The first thing the team should do is gather data on where we currently are in meeting our established mission.

- The data must be current.
- The data must be accurate.
- The data must be objective.

Based on the data gathered, the team must answer the following questions, beyond those points bulleted above, on each bit of information:

- How did we get here? What have we done to find ourselves where we currently are? Recognize the good and the bad. Repeat the good and learn from the bad.

- Who are our customers? (both internal – the governing body, the administration, the employees, etc., and external – the general public, business owners, the University, etc.)
- How well satisfied are they with current services provided by the fire division? What do we need to do to raise that satisfaction level?
- Do they have an accurate picture of our current level of service? If not, it may be time to re-educate them to realize the true situation.
- What level of quality do they expect from the fire division? (Be realistic)
- Are we meeting these expectations? If not, how can we better meet these expectations?
- What concerns, or issues do they have that we can address?

Once this data is gathered, the team must determine what our goals should be. Remember, goals are the plateaus you strive for that will ultimately bring the vision to reality. Questions to ask in determining goals, beyond the above bulleted questions/points include:

- How does this goal help us bring the vision to reality?
- Is this goal feasible?
- What problems can we expect in working toward this goal?
- How are we going to address these problems?
- Who will take the lead on accomplishing this goal?
- What is our justification for arguing for this goal to be included in the budget?

- Who will be involved in the process of attaining this goal? (internally and externally)
- What resources are necessary in attaining this goal?
- What identified resources do we currently have at our disposal?
- Where do we get the necessary resources that we do not currently have?
- Are there alternative ways to finance this goal? (Grants, etc.)
- How do we “sell” our superiors that this goal is worthy of pursuit?
- How will this goal affect other identified goals?
- How will we know we have accomplished this goal? How do we measure success?
- What is the timeline for this goal?

Once goals are established, they must be prioritized. It is recommended that an oversight committee be formed to ferret through the proposed goals to rank the goals out. Some may overlap with others. Some may be deleted altogether. This committee should be headed by the DPSD, and he should have the overall authority in ranking the goals. The committee is to steer the DPSD in making his final decision.

Once the goals have been identified and prioritized, it is time to develop strategies to achieve the goals. This would include development of objectives. Remember, objectives are the benchmarks that are used in the process of achieving the goal. Once again, the same questions and points listed above must be addressed. Remember, several options should be presented as to how to reach these objectives. These options, in turn, should be discussed by all who

participate in determining the options, and the best option pursued. The other options should be noted and kept, in case the chosen option proves to not be the best solution.

Once all of this is in place, a system of overseeing the strategies should be established. The “rules of engagement” should be defined.

- Who is responsible for oversight of the project(s)?
- How does that person oversee the project(s)?
- What are his/her limitations in oversight of the projects?
- What authority will be granted to this person in oversight of his/her assigned project(s), and what are the limitations?
- Where does this overseer go when he/she has reached the limits of his/her authority concerning this project?

Once this has been established, it is time to implement the plan.

Implementation begins with presentation of the plan to the authority having jurisdiction. In our case, the first stop would be the Public Safety Director. The plan should be formally presented, not just in casual conversation, and preferably, not in fragments. Cohesion is important. A professional presentation is a must. Preparation should be thorough. Anticipate arguments against the plan and develop answers to any possible questions that may arise. Be prepared. Practice the presentation in front of the team, (several times if necessary), in order to hammer out what and where changes may need to be made in the presentation. Get it right before you go before the Public Safety Director.

At this point, the Deputy Public Safety Director – Fire Operations has met his/her obligation for developing and presenting a strategic plan for the fire division. The Public Safety Director may or may not approve of the plan. He/she may approve of the plan, provided certain changes are made in the plan. Work *willingly* with the Public Safety Director on this. Remember, he has to fit your plan for the division into his plan for the Department. Work it out. Any changes in the plan should be communicated to the team as soon as possible. If rumors filter in, the trust factor may be compromised, and trust is a must for successful implementation of a strategic plan.

If approved by the Public Safety Director, the Public Safety Director should make the same presentation to the City Manager. He/she may request that the DPSDFO accompany him/her to this presentation meeting. He/she may allow the DPSDFO to present the plan to the City Manager. Be ready and eager to do this. Follow the same guidelines should be followed in presentation to the City Manager as were used in presentation to the Public Safety Director.

Once the City Manager is brought on board, he/she will present the proposed plan to the City Council for approval. Once approval of the plan is accomplished, it is time to set the plan in motion. Remember, the plan should be flexible, in order to adapt as problems come up that may redirect the plan. Flexible, but focused. Remain focused on the vision, recognize the steps it is going to take to achieve the vision, and adjust accordingly, as the situation dictates.

Once the plan is in motion, monitor progress, as specified in your “rules of engagement”. Revisit the plan and adjust accordingly, adapting to the changes that you facilitate through achievement, or lack of achievement of objectives and goals that you established. Then, begin the process again.

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