

## Freeville Fire Department 3-Year Strategic Plan

### INTRODUCTION

Like most rural volunteer departments, the Freeville Fire Department (FFD) is facing significant challenges, including:

- A continuing increase in the number of calls we handle each year
- A continuing increase in the cost of equipment and apparatus
- Increasing regulation, such as equipment expiration schedules, that drive cost increases
- Increasing training and reporting requirements that demand more time from volunteers
- Increasing complexity in the situations we face that result from:
  - New technology such as Electric Vehicles, Solar Panel Installations, Energy Storage Systems, Powdered Metal 3D printing, etc.
  - Social challenges such as mental health issues and drug usage
  - Changes in our district such as the introduction of the rail trail
- A steady decrease in volunteerism rates

To ensure continued success, this strategic plan focuses on three critical areas: Membership, Training, and Balancing Equipment Needs with Capital Reserve Funding. These areas have been identified through a comprehensive SWOT analysis that was conducted with the entire company on August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024, and are essential for sustaining the department's operations and enhancing its capabilities. We expect that the following strategic goals will require a minimum of three years to reach a sustainable and repeatable state.

## 1. Membership

### Current Situation

The FFD benefits from a committed and experienced core group of members, with a strong sense of camaraderie and broad community support. However, we do not have enough members to meet the ever-increasing demands on our department. We need to attract new volunteers, particularly younger members, and ensure sufficient daytime responders. Establishing a sustainable program to recruit and retain members needs to be one of our primary objectives.

# FREEVILLE FIRE DEPARTMENT

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W. B. STRONG FIRE COMPANY OF FREEVILLE INC.

## Goals and Objectives

- **Increase Membership:** Develop strategies to recruit new members, focusing on younger volunteers to ensure the longevity of the department. Our goal is to add 4-5 new members per year.
- **Retention:** Foster a supportive and inclusive environment that encourages long-term commitment from existing members. Our goal is to lose only 1-2 members per year and only due to circumstances that are beyond our control.
- **Daytime Responders:** Implement targeted recruitment efforts to ensure availability of responders during daytime hours.

## Strategies

- We will establish a recruiting and retention committee this fall to create the specific strategies needed to meet these objectives.
- We will also evaluate the possibility of restarting our former bunker program as another option to help meet our response needs.
- We believe this topic should be a central theme of our conversations with the Town Board and that some level of membership recruitment and retention should be driven at a town-wide level.

## 2. Training

### Current Situation

Having well-trained members is fundamental to the effectiveness of our department and the safety of our members. While we currently have some excellent department level and town-wide trainings, the frequency and comprehensiveness of these drills has been inconsistent. There was a consensus among the members that more training was needed, especially hands-on and advanced training. Specific needs identified included:

- Onboarding training to bring new members up to speed more quickly
- Driver training to increase our number of certified drivers
- Training for emergency events that result from Evolving Technology such as Solar Arrays, Energy Storage Systems, Electric or Alternative Fuel Vehicles, etc.
- Training that prepares our members to deal with the increase in severe weather events.

The members have found the town-wide trainings from Meridian to be especially beneficial and prefer hands-on training opportunities whenever possible. We would welcome assistance from the Town Board to help promote and finance training activities.

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## Goals and Objectives

- **Enhance Existing Training Programs:** Establish comprehensive member training objectives and regular training schedules to ensure all members are well-prepared for various emergency situations.
- **Onboard New Members Effectively:** Develop clear training timelines and checklists to bring new members up to speed quickly and efficiently.
- **Advanced and Specialized Training:** Provide opportunities for members to gain advanced skills and certifications in specialized areas of fire and rescue operations.

## Strategies

### 1. Regular and Structured Drills:

- Document training objectives for each class of member (Interior, Exterior, Driver, EMS, Auxiliary, etc).
- Establish a monthly drill schedule that includes a mix of basic, intermediate, and advanced training scenarios that will meet the training objectives.
- Incorporate feedback and lessons learned from previous drills to continuously improve training effectiveness.

### 2. Onboarding Programs:

- Develop a comprehensive onboarding training program with clear milestones and timelines for new members.
- Use peer-led training sessions to reinforce learning and build camaraderie among the team.

### 3. Leverage External Resources:

- Continue to partner with neighboring departments to facilitate town-wide training events.
- Utilize external training providers to access specialized courses and certifications, such as those focusing on new hazards like electric vehicles and lithium battery fires.
- Apply for training grants to fund participation in advanced training programs.

## 3. Balancing Equipment Needs and Capital Reserve Funding

### Current Situation

Our department is facing rising costs for equipment and apparatus, an ageing building in-need of significant maintenance, and increasing demands on our abilities. The need to maintain and upgrade equipment is critical to ensure operational effectiveness. Yet, like most rural departments, we have limited budgetary resources to make necessary upgrades.

The FFD has historically utilized a 20-year replacement schedule for major apparatus purchases. Given the steep rise in equipment cost, this may no longer be feasible. We have recently made the decision to refurbish our heavy rescue rather than purchase a new replacement.

### Goals and Objectives

- **Prepare for Evolving Risks:** Proactively acquire or upgrade equipment necessary to respond to new challenges resulting from severe weather, new technologies, and changes in our community.
- **Sustainable Equipment Management:** Develop a strategic approach to managing equipment that balances immediate needs with long-term financial sustainability.
- **Capital Reserve Fund Optimization:** Ensure that the Capital Reserve Fund is utilized effectively to support both current and future equipment needs.

### Strategies

1. **Prioritization of Equipment Needs:**
  - Conduct an assessment of current equipment and identify priority areas for replacement or upgrades needed to prepare for future events.
  - Revise our multi-year equipment replacement plan to align with our department's financial capabilities.
2. **Cost-Effective Procurement:**
  - Collaborate with other departments to leverage group purchasing power for better pricing on equipment.
  - Pursue federal, state and private grants whenever possible.
  - Consider purchasing used or refurbished equipment to conserve our funds.
3. **Capital Reserve Fund Strategy:**
  - Develop consistent reporting to communicate to all interested parties the state of our Capital Reserve Funds relative to our needs.
  - Review and adjust the Capital Reserve Fund contributions to ensure adequate funding for upcoming large-scale equipment purchases.