

Town of Lebanon

FIRE STUDY

In consultation with the Virginia Department of Fire Programs.



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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Virginia Fire Services Board would like to extend thanks to the following organizations and individuals for their contribution to this study:

Russell County Board of Supervisors

Drew Shortt, Lebanon Town Manager

Lebanon Town Council

Lebanon Volunteer Fire Department

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Chief John McCoy, Lebanon Vol. Fire Dept.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report documents the findings and recommendations for the Town of Lebanon Fire Study. This study and the information contained herein should not be construed as legal advice or as binding recommendations for the Town of Lebanon. This report provides guidance to the Lebanon Town Council, the Town Manager, its fire department, and other stakeholders in the community regarding public safety. The town should strive to meet and/or exceed the recommendations contained in this report.

This study was requested by a resolution of the Lebanon Town Council to analyze the following working areas which include:

- Organization
- Budget and Administration
- Training
- Delivery of Services
- Fleet Design and Management (Equipment/Apparatus)

The study was conducted by the Virginia Fire Services Board in partnership with the Virginia Department of Fire Programs. The Virginia Department of Health's Office of EMS was not included in the study considering the Lebanon Volunteer Fire Department is not a licensed EMS agency. The above referenced working areas served as a guide for the study team to identify issues, evaluate current fire operations, and make recommendations to improve the service of the volunteer fire department. Of note, Russell County was not a formal member of the study requested by the Town of Lebanon but provided information as requested by the study team.

The Virginia Fire Services Board, as well as the Department of Fire Programs, apologize for the delay in the production of this report. The study team noted that many of the original issues identified in the original request for the study were remedied or in the process of being addressed during the site visit. The Lebanon Volunteer Fire Department presented a professional organization that was focused on improving resources, training, and other areas for the betterment of their response district. The recommendations contained in this report are areas for possible improvement as the department and the Town of Lebanon look towards the future.

The study team recommends that the Town of Lebanon, in partnership with the Lebanon Volunteer Fire Department, conduct a community risk assessment. A community risk assessment offers valuable insight into the response needs of the community, target hazards, response capabilities, and priorities for emergency response. This assessment can offer a roadmap for many of the other recommendations in the report. As a component of the assessment, the fire chief should also assess the status of the fleet of the Lebanon Volunteer Fire Department. Utilizing data from both assessments, the fire chief should draft and submit a report on the need for an aerial device in the Town of Lebanon.

Firefighter training is an important component of any fire department. The study team was impressed by the training program and information presented during the site visit. The team recommends that training programs be formalized in writing for each position type, specifically interior firefighters and personnel who operate department owned or operated vehicles. The

Town of Lebanon could also work with Russell County and other localities in the region to create a regional fire training center utilizing grant funds. This would address the significant distance from Lebanon to regional training sites.

The Town Manager should include the fire department in the capital improvement plan, and the Fire Chief should work to create a capital improvement plan related to apparatus, facilities, equipment, and any other large scale funding needs. This improvement plan is a necessity with rising costs of said items for a relatively small locality such as Lebanon. In addition to the capital improvement plan, a strategic plan should be developed. The Fire Chief should work with members of the Lebanon Volunteer Fire Department to identify goals for the department, the Town Manager with the Lebanon Town Council and Mayor, and both with members of the community to formulate the Town of Lebanon Fire Protection Strategic Plan.

Although the department did not report issues with membership, the study team recommends that recruitment and retention be improved. National and state data show that volunteerism is in decline and suggests greater recruitment and retention initiatives are needed. The Fire Chief and the town should work together to review fire department culture, establish a recruitment and retention plan, and incentivize joining the Lebanon Volunteer Fire Department.

Communication should be improved between the fire department and town leadership. The Fire Chief and Town Manager should meet more frequently, and the department should annually host town leadership to improve working relationships. The department and the town should also establish written procedures for budgeting and a means for the fire chief to provide written reports on the actions of the department.

The fire department should formalize operations, training, and other areas in standard operating procedures and/or guidelines (SOP/SOG). These SOPs/SOGs should ensure the safety of the public and the firefighters. Specific areas to review could include training requirements, drivers training, expectations on emergency incidents, etc. The study team also strongly encourages the department to report fire incidents to VFIRS and NFIRS so that data can be used to better illustrate the needs of the fire service nationally, as well as in the Commonwealth of Virginia. This data is also key in many federal and private grant applications.

Both the Lebanon Town Council and the Lebanon Volunteer Fire Department are encouraged to work together to find sustainable and appropriate funding and support for fire suppression in the Town of Lebanon.

METHODOLOGY

The following is an overview of the study process:

PHASE I: INITIATE PROJECT

Objectives: Initiation of Study

To initiate the study, the Lebanon Town Manager sent a Resolution, on behalf of the Town Council, to the Virginia Fire Services Board requesting a review of the fire department in the town (Reference Appendix A).

The town requested the following areas of concentration:

- Organization
- Budget and Administration
- Training
- Delivery of Services
- Fleet Design and Management (Equipment/Apparatus)

A study team was convened and the study team began by reviewing data submitted by the fire department and the town, including the self-assessment questionnaire. The team also began collecting and reviewing existing data, memorandums of understanding and relevant policies and procedures.

As part of Phase I, the study team met with leadership from the town to establish working relationships, make logistical arrangements, and determine communication lines. During these meetings, the study team discussed the objectives of the project and identified any issues and concerns central to the study.

PHASE II: OBTAIN STAKEHOLDER INPUT

Objectives: Conduct Leadership Interviews & Capture Input from the Departments

The second phase of the study consisted of leadership interviews and department evaluations. The expectations were as follows:

- Identify opinions of department personnel concerning the operations and performance of their department;
- Identify issues and concerns of personnel regarding fire and rescue services;
- Identify perceived gaps in existing service levels and new priorities in mission; and,
- Identify strengths and weaknesses as perceived by departmental personnel.

The study team, in coordination with town leadership, developed a schedule of face-to-face interviews with the fire department, town officials, as well as county leadership as outlined below.

The study team met with leadership from Russell County to include a member of the Board of Supervisors and the County Administrator. The study team also met leadership from the Town of Lebanon, including members of the Town Council and the Town Manager. These meetings provided important information on the role of the fire department in the community.

All interviews were conducted during an allotted timeframe and a considerable amount of information was collected. A public hearing was advertised by the town and held on December 13, 2023 to give the public an opportunity to share feedback with the study team regarding the fire department in the Town of Lebanon.

During the interviews and public hearing, the study team received information regarding volunteer staffing levels, service delivery, budget information, apparatus, relationships between the town and volunteers, and other information about the operation of the volunteer department. The discussion also provided an opportunity for leadership to share comments regarding service delivery of fire services in the town and possible areas for improvement.

PHASE III: PREPARE ANALYSES AND DEVELOP CORE STRATEGIES

Objectives: Evaluate Current Trends and Prepare a Report

The third phase of the study involved further investigation and understanding of the organizational structures, operations, limitations, achievements, and opportunities for improvement within the fire department. The activities that supported this process consisted of additional requests for information not already obtained in Phase I and II of the work plan. Data requests, made in this phase of the study, attempt to address any issues that emerged from the interviews, and further evaluate implications of the operational issues cited. During this phase, the study team worked with fire department personnel and other departments to obtain additional information. Data obtained during the study process also assists the study team in identifying issues influencing the current levels of service.

PHASE IV: PREPARE FINAL REPORT

Objectives: Prepare and Present Final Report

The final phase of the study involved documenting the results of all previous tasks into a written report with critical components, such as an executive summary, methodology, background, and findings and recommendations. Once completed, a draft report was shared with the Lebanon Town Manager to ensure the technical content in this report is accurate. Upon receiving corrections, the study team revised the draft report, as needed, to assist in the preparation and issuance of the final report.

TOWN INFORMATION

The Town of Lebanon is located in Russell County in Southwestern Virginia. Lebanon is surrounded by Russell County and serves as the county seat. The town was created in 1819 when a commission was developed to select a new county seat for Russell County that would be more centrally located.¹

The town has 4.83 square miles of land, although the fire department covers a larger service area including the town and parts of unincorporated Russell County immediately surrounding the town. Lebanon is primarily served by U.S Route 19.

The estimated population in the Town of Lebanon in 2022 was 3,139 people with a median household income of \$50,287 and a total of 1,276 housing units.

The town operates under the guidance of a Town Council comprise of 6 council members. The Town Manager serves as the Chief Administrative Officer and serves as the primary manager of town business. The Town of Lebanon also has an elected Town Mayor elected separately from the town council who serves as chief executive. The Lebanon Fire Department Chief is selected by the members of the Lebanon Volunteer Fire Department. Lebanon does not have any current paid fire department staff. Of note, Lebanon Fire Department does not provide emergency medical services as licensed through the Virginia Department of Health.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations contained in this study are not a requirement for the town to implement. The recommendations are to be used as a guideline of potential solutions that could assist the town as it further develops its capabilities to provide fire protection. Many of the recommendations contained in this report may be sought through a partnership with Russell County. An investment by both the Town of Lebanon and Russell County must continue to be made in fire protection and the provision of emergency medical services. The purpose of the study is to review weaknesses, and highlight strengths, found during a review of the Lebanon Volunteer Fire Department. The recommendations contained in this report are directed to better serve the citizens and visitors of the Town of Lebanon, while also calling attention to specific areas for improvement for firefighters and the department.

Some recommendations below refer to National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards. Much of this report is provided with reference to NFPA 1720: Standard on Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Volunteer Fire Departments.

According to chapter 1 of NFPA 1720, the standard defines “levels of service, deployment capabilities, and staffing levels for substantially volunteer fire departments. It contains minimum requirements for deploying fire suppression and EMS for service delivery, response capabilities and resources. It also contains requirements for managing resources and systems such as health and safety, incident management, training, communications, and pre-incident planning. It

¹ History, Town of Lebanon

addresses the strategic and system issues involving the organization, operations, and deployment of a volunteer fire department.”²

The National Fire Protection Association provides industry-wide best practices for fire and EMS service. Although the NFPA standards are considered best practices, the study team understands that not all NFPA standards are attainable in individual jurisdictions. The Town of Lebanon should work collaboratively with the Lebanon Volunteer Fire Department to determine best practices that are attainable for the department.

Some of the below points are considered recommendations to improve services, while other points commend the work of the Town of Lebanon and Lebanon Volunteer Fire Department.

I. COMMUNITY RISK ASSESSMENT

CRR is defined by Vision 20/20 as “a process to identify and prioritize local risks, followed by the integrated and strategic investment of resources (emergency response and prevention) to reduce their occurrence and impact.” CRR provides a focused approach to reducing local identified specific risks while also identifying areas for improvement within a department or community. Each CRR plan will be unique to each locality, based on the types of risks identified for that community and the needs identified. The study team recommends a holistic community risk assessment that looks at the Town of Lebanon overall, with specific emphasis on identifying the types of emergency responses, the equipment needed to effectively respond, and the funds required to provide this response.

Risk assessment is the identification of potential and likely risks within a particular community and the process of prioritizing those risks. It is the critical initial step in emergency preparedness. The response environment looks at the type of incidents to which public safety organizations in the community respond, and the capabilities of these organizations.

Of note, the department mentioned the need for an aerial device in the Town of Lebanon. Russell County, as a whole, does not possess an aerial device and relies on the Town of Abingdon to respond by request. A community risk assessment can provide insight on this request. The study team commends the department for identifying hazardous materials in the response area and conducting preplans of businesses in the area. These are crucial to fire prevention and community risk reduction.

Recommendations:

1. The Fire Chief should conduct a narrow-focused CRA of emergencies in the response district, including the type of emergency, frequency, and type of resource(s) needed. This process should also include a review of community profile information, event history and response capabilities of both the department and mutual aid departments. By examining the types and frequency of incidents to which the Lebanon Volunteer Fire Department responds, a CRA will help focus and prioritize the fire prevention/loss prevention activities of both the community and department. For example, examining the number of

² NFPA 1720: Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Volunteer Fire Departments.

The foregoing is a recommendation authorized pursuant to Va. Code 9.1-203.A.4 and is not to be construed as legal advice or as a binding recommendation.

firefighters, as well as the type of apparatus needed (engine, ladder, rescue, etc) can help the department make long term decisions.

- a. The Fire Chief could request the VDFP CRR Coordinator return and assist the county in its Community Risk Assessment (CRA).
 - b. NFPA 1720 indicates that the emergency services engage in the development of a community risk management plan for fire, emergency medical service, and hazardous materials use, storage, and transportation within the county.
2. The Fire Chief should conduct a fleet risk assessment. From this fleet risk assessment, the Fire Chief should work with the department and leadership from the Town of Lebanon and Russell County to plan for the replacement or updating of apparatus. A fleet risk assessment should include at a minimum:
- a. A focus on apparatus that meet community specific needs such as population density, zoning, development, previous call data, etc.
 - b. The age of the apparatus.
 - c. The average use of the apparatus annually.
 - d. The ability of the apparatus to provide the adequate resources needed on regular responses identified in the community risk assessment.
3. The Fire Chief should, utilizing call data and the community risk assessment, provide a report to the Lebanon Town Council on the possible need for an aerial device for use by the Lebanon Volunteer Fire Department. This report should note, in an annual period, the number of calls that the department could have effectively used an aerial device to complete a victim rescue. It should also note and list buildings in the first due response area that a ladder truck would be beneficial (three stories or more when considering elevation).
- a. Upon completion of this report, the Town of Lebanon should consult with Russell County about the need for an aerial device countywide. If a need is identified countywide, the localities should partner to purchase the aerial device and place it at an appropriate location. Some localities have purchased specialty apparatus for use by multiple volunteer departments that received training to use it. For example, the aerial device might be owned by Russell County and be available for use by multiple departments who received training on the device.
 - b. The study team recommends that any aerial device be equipped with the ability to serve as an elevated master stream. This creates a more versatile apparatus that could not only operate in a victim rescue capacity, but also in a fire suppression role.

II. TRAINING

One of the most important components of any fire department is maintaining that firefighters are prepared to respond effectively to emergencies that they face. The study team noted that the Lebanon Volunteer Fire Department conducts regular training, has two training officers who actively work to further their own education to pass on, and keep records of their training through a document referred to as “LVFD Training Minutes”. The study team applauds the department for making notable progress in the training arena.

Recommendations contained below are directed at formalizing this training, as well as increasing the ability to conduct training by investing in a long-term training site in cooperation with other regional partners.

Recommendations:

1. The Fire Chief should, through either standard operating procedure or the department’s bylaws, require certain training be conducted to be considered for certain roles on an emergency scene. The study team was provided with internal programs for release as a driver/pump operator, as well as a requirement to have Firefighter I before becoming interior qualified. The team recommends that these requirements be formalized. In addition, the department should establish training requirements that:
 - a. Utilize accredited classes when necessary, such as Basic Pump Operator or Firefighter I or II. These classes add credibility to programs and are nationally recognized.
 - b. Establish guidelines for those riding in charge of apparatus or who will serve in a command capacity on an incident scene.
 - c. The Department of Fire Programs Division Chief 4 should be consulted for further development of firefighter training and relevant classes for the area.
2. The Fire Chief should, through either standard operating procedure or the department’s bylaws, establish and require all personnel who drive department vehicles to have met certain requirements. Recommended requirements include Emergency Vehicle Operators Course as taught by the Department of Fire Programs, the Virginia Association of Volunteer Rescue Squads, or VFIS, certain hours or drive time in ideal conditions with a qualified field training officer, certain hours or drive time at night with a qualified field training officer, written assessment of the departments safety and risk management policies, as well as applicable laws of the commonwealth.
3. The Town Manager, with the support of the Town Council and Fire Chief, should consult with Russell County on the possible creation of a fire training center in the area. Other jurisdictions may be able to partner in this process as well. The study team noted that training facilities were not in close proximity to the town.
 - a. The Town of Lebanon, with partnership from other regional localities, could explore the construction of a live fire training structure. The Virginia Fire Services Board offers up to \$480,000 for the construction of a structure based on 4 prototypes.

- i. Refer to the Department of Fire Programs' *Live Fire Training Structure Grant Program*³
 - b. The Town of Lebanon, with partnership from other regional localities, could utilize the Regional Fire Services Training Grant Program to purchase other training props for confined space SCBA, mayday training, drafting, flashover simulators, LP gas, or other props that could be utilized for firefighter training.
 - i. Refer to the Department of Fire Programs' *Regional Fire Services Training Grant Program*⁴
- 4. The Fire Chief should continue to support and encourage members to attend training conferences/conventions such as the Virginia Fire Rescue Conference, the Virginia First Responders Conference, FDIC, and others. These conferences offer insight into how other departments train and provide services to the community. Networking can also prove beneficial for the development of tactics and other recommendations contained herein.

III. CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The study team reviewed the apparatus and equipment operated by the Lebanon Volunteer Fire Department. The team notes that the equipment was in working order and well maintained. Recent data suggests that the cost of apparatus and major equipment such as self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA), hose, and other essential equipment is quickly outpacing most department's ability to purchase the equipment.⁵ The below recommendations are related to long term planning for both the Town of Lebanon and the fire department. A capital improvement plan (CIP) is "a community planning and fiscal management tool used to coordinate the location, timing and financing of capital improvements over a multi-year period — usually 4-6 years."⁶

Recommendations:

1. The Lebanon Town Manager should, in consultation with the Lebanon Town Council, include fire department equipment such as apparatus in the town's capital improvement plan.
2. The Fire Chief should implement a capital improvement plan that addresses apparatus, equipment such as hose, turnout gear, and self-contained breathing apparatus, facilities, and other long-term projects for fire suppression as identified in the risk assessment.
3. Apparatus needs should be identified in the risk assessment and replacement should be scheduled as a component of the capital improvement plan.

³ Live Fire Training Structure Grant Program

⁴ Regional Fire Services Grant Policy

⁵ Service to the Commonwealth

⁶ Planning Implementation Tools Capital Improvement Plan

4. Facility upgrades should be identified in the risk assessment and repairs/upgrades be scheduled as a component of the capital improvement plan.
5. Any other major, reoccurring purchase should be scheduled as a component of the capital improvement plan.
6. Additional information on developing a capital improvement plan:
 - a. Planning Implementation Tools Capital Improvement Plan⁷
 - b. Effectively Developing a Capital Improvement Plan for the Rio Rancho Fire Department⁸

IV. STRATEGIC PLAN

Strategic planning is defined as the “going organizational process of using available knowledge to document a business's intended direction. This process is used to prioritize efforts, effectively allocate resources, align shareholders and employees on the organization’s goals, and ensure those goals are backed by data and sound reasoning.”⁹ Although most people, and department members, often do not consider fire departments to be a business, there are numerous connections that make strategic planning worthwhile. For fire departments, strategic planning should prioritize efforts and allocate resources based on the community’s need backed by data and reasoning. Recommendations below relate to the Town of Lebanon, utilizing data, community engagement, and information obtained from risk assessments, creating a strategic plan related to fire protection.

Recommendations:

1. The Fire Chief should, consulting with the membership of the Lebanon Volunteer Fire Department, draft a list of short- and long-term goals of the department. These goals can vary widely based on a review of the department up to and including equipment, facilities, training, personnel, and other goals. Short term goals should be identified for the next 1-2 years, while long term goals should range from 5-10 years. The Fire Chief and his officers should determine what avenues exist to meet these goals.
2. The Town Manager, in consultation with the Town Council, should draft a list of short- and long-term goals for fire protection. These goals can vary widely based on a review of the community and could include changes to the fire department or other infrastructure such as zoning and water supply. Short term goals should be identified for the next 1-2 years, while long term goals should range from 5-10 years. The Town Manager should determine what avenues exist to meet these goals.
3. The Fire Chief and Town Manager should hold a series of community meetings to solicit goals from the community related to fire protection. These community meetings should

⁷ Planning Implementation Tools Capital Improvement Plan

⁸ Effectively Developing a Capital Improvement Plan for the Rio Rancho Fire Department

⁹ Why is Strategic Planning Important

be well advertised and be an open forum for citizens to discuss needs and their intended goals.

4. The Town Manager and Fire Chief should, utilizing information from the Town Council's list, Fire Chief's list, goals identified by the community, and information from the community risk assessment, draft a strategic plan for fire protection in the Town of Lebanon. This plan should be presented and adopted by the Town Council in a public meeting.
5. The Fire Chief and Town Manager should meet biannually to discuss meeting the goals identified in the strategic plan.
6. More information on strategic plans:
 - a. Four Steps to High-Impact Strategic Planning in Government¹⁰
 - b. Fire Department Strategic Planning 101¹¹

V. **RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION**

The Lebanon Volunteer Fire Department is made up of dedicated volunteer firefighters who provide fire suppression and other rescue services to their fellow citizens. The Commonwealth of Virginia, as a whole, has seen a steep decline in volunteer first responders for a variety of reasons. This poses a significant threat to public safety in Virginia if numbers continue to decline. The leadership of the department did not report issues related to having adequate members to respond to emergency calls. However, the study team also learned that there was no formalized recruitment or marketing of the department. The Town of Lebanon and the leadership of the Lebanon Volunteer Fire Department must remain committed to recruitment and retention to maintain an adequate number of first responders. The study team did not see indications that paid staff were required for fire suppression at this point, but always recommends that localities annually reassess risk and the availability of volunteer first responders.

Recommendations:

1. The Fire Chief should review fire department culture and encourage a modification of the "how we do things culture". This starts with an assessment to determine what the main operational areas are for their organization, such as operations, administration, fundraising, training, etc. The department could target recruitment of individual members to handle non-emergent functions such as fundraising, entering fire reports, marketing/social media initiatives, fire & life safety education and community programs, human resource management, station & apparatus maintenance, and in-house training. By utilizing these specialized groups to achieve specific tasks, it works to free up the demands on those members that are interested in responding to emergencies and maintaining the necessary training.

¹⁰ Four Steps to High-Impact Planning in Government

¹¹ Fire Department Strategic Planning 101

2. The Fire Chief should create a Recruitment and Retention Coordinator or place this role under a current officer's duties. This position should develop a Recruitment and Retention Plan for the Lebanon Volunteer Fire Department that considers classes of membership, means of recruiting, and retention programs where applicable.
 - a. Utilize the National Volunteer Fire Council outline for volunteer agencies.¹²
 - b. Reference the United States Fire Administration's Retention and Recruitment for the Volunteer Emergency Services¹³
 - c. Market the department through social media and other means to solicit volunteers.
 - d. Highlight noteworthy calls for service, training, or volunteer accomplishments on social media.
3. The Lebanon Town Council should consider reducing or eliminating certain fees or taxes related to town services where applicable for all bona fide volunteer firefighters. The council could work with the Fire Chief and Town Treasurer to determine who would be eligible for these incentives and the relative cost to the town. If the town chooses to implement a retention initiative such as this, the Fire Chief should be required to develop standards for active membership and annually submit a list of members to the Town of Lebanon.
4. The Fire Chief should create an incentive program funded through donations from the community or other revenues. This incentive fund should be utilized to provide funds to volunteers to purchase individual equipment items not provided by the department. A SOP should be implemented that outlines the program requirements and how funds would be disbursed equitably. Similar programs found in other areas are based on various concepts including:
 - a. A monetary stipend based on active membership or on a per call basis.
 - b. A points-based system where a member receives points for components like calls ran, meetings attended, training attended, etc. These points equate to dollars, which eventually cap at a certain amount set to make sure sufficient funds are available.
 - c. A flat rate based on yearly donations to the program or money allocated that is equitable to all members who meet certain requirements stated in the policy.
 - d. A certain item or piece of equipment provided to all members who meet certain requirements stated in the policy.
5. The Fire Chief could consider the development of a tuition reimbursement program to take online classes, attend community college courses, or complete a relevant degree. Although this investment could prove costly, the chief could adopt this as a component of an incentive program. Grants may be available to assist with these programs. The department may also partner with a private funding source or business to sponsor 1-2 members each year under this program.
6. The Town Manager, in consultation with the Fire Chief, could consider applying for a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Staffing For Adequate Fire and

¹² Develop a Recruitment and Retention Plan

¹³ Recruitment and Retention for Volunteer Emergency Services

Emergency Response (SAFER) grant for recruitment and retention. This grant program was specifically designed to assist departments in increasing or maintaining frontline firefighters and meeting NFPA 1710 or 1720.¹⁴ The study team specifically recommends that the department apply under the recruitment and retention category. For more information, please consult the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

- a. SAFER Program: Recruitment and Retention Of Volunteer Firefighters Request Details Information¹⁵

7. The Fire Chief, in consultation with town leadership, should explore joining the Volunteer Firefighters' & Rescue Squad Workers' Service Award Program (VOLSAP). VOLSAP, created by state statute, is a mechanism by which optional retirement savings for volunteer firefighters and rescue squad workers can be invested. Members contributions, coupled with contributions made by the department/locality, are invested by the Virginia Retirement System, and can be withdrawn at a certain age much like a standard employee retirement.¹⁶

VI. COMMUNICATION

Communication is considered to be one of the most important components of any organization. In public safety, communication can often be the lifeline in critical incidents that ensures necessary resources are assigned to an incident or operating effectively. This importance translates to the communication channels between the officers of the Lebanon Volunteer Fire Department, firefighters, town leadership, and ultimately to the wider public that is served. The study team encountered, through meetings with all parties, a need for increased communication between the different facets mentioned above.

Recommendations:

1. The Fire Chief should have monthly meetings with the Town Manager to ensure regular and transparent communication.
 - a. The Fire Chief should provide a report to the Town Manager that includes call volume, an update on membership, a log of broken or equipment requiring maintenance, and any extensive purchases that the department will not be able to handle within the normal operating budget.
2. The Town Manager should create a standardized process for the Lebanon Volunteer Fire Department to make annual budgetary requests and one-time purchases.
3. The department should host the town council for an overview of the department, a demonstration of equipment, and general interaction to increase relationships between the two groups periodically.

¹⁴ Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response

¹⁵ SAFER: Recruitment and Retention of Volunteer Firefighters Request Details Information

¹⁶ Virginia Volunteer Firefighters' & Rescue Squad Workers' Service Award Program

4. The Fire Chief could designate a public information officer (PIO) that would be responsible for documenting calls, posting on social media, and creating a monthly newsletter for distribution to interested citizens, town leadership, and department members. This newsletter could include a message from the chief, information on calls in the previous month, training events, fundraising, and other pertinent information.
 - a. “Six Benefits of Effective Public Information Officers” *Fire Engineering*¹⁷

VII. SOP/SOG

Standard Operating Guidelines (SOGs) are written guidelines that explain what is expected of emergency personnel in performing their duties. SOGs are a “how-to” guideline to follow in order to achieve a desired goal. SOGs are not necessarily rules or regulations, but rather a path to achieve specific goals and objectives. Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) are formal policies that specify a course of action, thereby ensuring efficiency, predictability, consistency, and safety.¹⁸

The study team, when meeting with leadership from the Lebanon Volunteer Fire Department, was provided a copy of the organizations Constitution, as well as training materials, training requirements and other documents. The study team was also informed, through various meetings, of apparatus accidents that had occurred approximately 2-3 years prior. The team recognizes that the department has taken an active approach to addressing issues identified after the accidents, including driver training requirements and written tests for driver/pump operators. The below recommendations serve to further formalize the departments operations and training.

Recommendations:

1. The Fire Chief, in consultation with the officers of the department, should develop, publish, implement, and oversee standard operating procedures and guidelines. The Fire Chief and his officers must have the authority and tools to enforce SOPs and SOGs.
 - A. SOPs/SOGs should highlight firefighter safety and safe, industry standard practices for fire suppression.
2. The Fire Chief should, through SOP/SOG, develop minimum training requirements for interior firefighters. The Department of Fire Programs recommends that interior firefighters have a minimum of Firefighter I before entering an immediately dangerous to life and health (IDLH) environment.
3. The Fire Chief should, through SOP/SOG, develop minimum training requirements related to driving department vehicles. These training requirements could include credentialed classes such as EVOC, drive time under a field training officer, certain age requirements, etc. These training requirements should be shared with the town and the departments’ insurer to maintain that proper training is being provided before operating an emergency vehicle.

¹⁷ Six Benefits of Effective Public Information Officers

¹⁸ Standard Operating Procedures: The First Step to a Safer Fireground

4. Other SOP/SOG should be created outlining expectations on the fireground or emergency scene, requirements to act in charge of a scene, annual or regular training requirements, command procedures, mutual aid, use of personal protective equipment (PPE), and others as deemed necessary.
5. Examples of SOP/SOG:
 - A. Amherst County, Virginia Standard Operating Guidelines (2012)¹⁹
 - B. Bronson Volunteer Fire Rescue Standard Operating Guidelines (2010)²⁰

VIII. REPORTING

Incident reports on emergency responses by the fire service are submitted to NFIRS from the Commonwealth of Virginia through the VFIRS system. The information in these fire incident reports describes the type of incident responded to, where it occurred, the resources used to mitigate it, and other information designed specifically to understand the nature and causes of fire, hazardous materials (HazMat) incidents, and emergency medical service (EMS) incidents. Information is also collected on the number of civilian or firefighter casualties and an estimate of property loss. The VFIRS data is the primary source of data for a wide range of analyses and reports. The availability of accurate information about fires and other incidents is vital in determining the best and most effective methods of both fire control and fire prevention, as well as predict future problems in communities, and measuring the programs' performance.

VDFP is developing a new interactive website in which this fire data will be available for all localities whose fire department is identified by an FDID number. In the coming 18 months a new system, NERIS, will replace the nationwide NFIRS system while still utilizing a simplified VFIRS version. This will allow the state and local departments to view, utilize and analyze this information in a proactive manner.

Recommendations:

1. The Fire Chief should ensure that all emergency calls that the Lebanon Volunteer Fire Department responds to are reported via VFIRS. Not only does this process provide insight into the departments' emergency responses and trends, but it can also provide a means of comparing local trends to regional and national trends. This will also be important to understanding requests in the capital improvement plan, strategic plan, and determining the need for specialty apparatus. Grants often require justification of need, which call volume showed in an official reporting mechanism such as VFIRS and NFIRS can be used for.
2. The Fire Chief should prepare for the transition from NFIRS to NERIS being administered through the U.S Fire Administration. As stated above, this information is critical for the identification and mitigation of any community risks. The transition to NERIS is expected to provide faster and more effective data for the fire service.

¹⁹ Amherst County Standard Operating Guidelines

²⁰ Bronson Volunteer Fire and Rescue Standard Operating Guidelines

3. If the department requires additional funds to purchase hardware related to fire reporting, it should consider asking the Town of Lebanon to apply for a VFIRS Hardware Grant from the Department of Fire Programs.
 - a. VFIRS Hardware Grants²¹

IX. OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

The below recommendations are included as a component of the report because study team members felt that the information was both pertinent to the Town of Lebanon, as well as most fire and EMS studies conducted by the Virginia Fire Services Board. The recommendations are broad but encompass best practices to support future growth for the town and the Commonwealth of Virginia, as well as the safety and well-being of first responders and the citizens they protect.

Recommendations:

1. Cancer prevention is important in the fire service. Cancer is the leading health risk facing firefighters, largely due to the chemicals and carcinogens they are exposed to while engaged in response activities.²² Chemically based plastics are in use in nearly every product in our homes, business and vehicles and when they burn, their chemical composition changes.
 - a. The Fire Chief should develop operational SOP's that establish safe cancer prevention practices such as:
 - i. Gross decontamination after fire incidents
 - ii. Washing of firefighter PPE following fire or hazardous materials incidents
 - iii. A fire hood exchange program
 - iv. Shower facilities at the fire station
 - a. The Fire Chief should encourage /facilitate National Firefighter Registry (NFR) sign up. The Firefighter Cancer Registry Act of 2018 mandated the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) create a voluntary registry of firefighters to collect health and occupational information to determine cancer incidence in the U.S. fire service. In response to this mandate, CDC's National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) established the National Firefighter Registry (NFR).²³ The NFR will help researchers better understand and reduce cancer in firefighters by matching the information provided by participating NFR firefighters with cancer diagnosis information from state cancer registries. This matching process will allow NIOSH to study the relationship between firefighting and cancer outcomes over time.

Step 1: Firefighters sign up for the NFR.

²¹ VFIRS Hardware Grant Policy

²² Lavender Ribbon Report-Best Practices for Preventing Firefighter Cancer

²³ H.R 931 Firefighter Cancer Registry Act of 2018

Step 2: NIOSH researchers match firefighter profiles with potential information in state cancer registries over time. This makes it possible to study the relationship between firefighting and cancer over time, even if cancer diagnoses occur in the future.

Step 3: NIOSH captures work history details. This information can be used to better understand firefighters' exposures and how they may be related to cancer.

Step 4: Stronger evidence can help inform new health and safety measures to protect firefighters from cancer. Combining information from firefighters across the U.S. will help researchers better understand cancer and its risk factors in the fire service, which could ultimately help reduce cancer among firefighters for generations to come.

2. It is recommended that the Fire Chief create an equipment maintenance program to increase the life of apparatus and reduce repair costs. This equipment maintenance program should consider variables such as age and mechanical condition, as well as the use level of each apparatus.
3. The Lebanon Volunteer Fire Department should undergo annual audits by an outside entity. This information should be submitted to the Fire Chief and Town Manager for review. This maintains transparency over funds appropriated from the town, donations, and grant funds from other entities such as VDFP.
4. The Fire Chief should consider working with Russell County to utilize centralized purchasing for fire equipment. County procurement staff and the chief, in consultation with other fire departments in the county, could identify areas that the county could assist with purchasing supplies for the volunteer departments.
 - a. Many items can be centrally stored and distributed. In addition, many equipment purchases could be made county-wide to increase interoperability and reduce costs
5. Although not a specific area requested for review, the study team noted that some issues were reported with dispatch. The Fire Chief should consult with the Russell County Sheriff's Office on any issues related to the dispatching of fire apparatus and work to remedy any issues.

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The foregoing is a recommendation authorized pursuant to Va. Code 9.1-203.A.4 and is not to be construed as legal advice or as a binding recommendation.

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APPENDIX A

Resolution requesting the Virginia Fire Services Board conduct a comprehensive analysis of the
Town of Lebanon Fire Department of Russell County, Virginia

NELSON A. "TONY" DODI, Mayor
DeANNA C. JACKSON, Vice Mayor
KEVIN L. BLANKENSHIP, Town Manager
KEVIN D. TILLER, Town Attorney



TOWN OF LEBANON

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Lebanon, Virginia 24266

COUNCIL MEMBERS
A. DOYLE FIELDS
SCOTT J. GILMER
MARY J. STANLEY
M. ELIJAH LEONARD
W. BRADLEY LAMBERT

**RESOLUTION REQUESTING A
COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS (STUDY) OF THE
TOWN OF LEBANON'S FIRE DEPARTMENT**

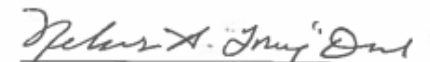
WHEREAS, the Fire Department is among the highest priorities demanded and expected by our citizens who deserve prompt and professional response every time they call 9-1-1; and

WHEREAS, the Lebanon Fire Department volunteers give unselfishly of their time from responding to service calls for the Town of Lebanon citizens;

WHEREAS, the Mayor and the Lebanon Town Council Members demonstrates its genuine commitment to this organization by appropriating \$93,323.20 in the current fiscal year for normal, recurring needs, while considering special requests as necessary; and

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED, that the Mayor and the Lebanon Town Council formally requests the completion of a Comprehensive Analysis (Study) of the Town of Lebanon's Volunteer Fire Department.

Adopted, August 16, 2021


Nelson A. "Tony" Dodi, Mayor


Diane Nunley, Clerk of Council

APPENDIX B

Letter Requesting a Fire Study from the Lebanon Town Manager

NELSON A. "TONY" DODI, Mayor
DeANNA C. JACKSON, Vice Mayor
KEVIN L. BLANKENSHIP, Town Manager
KEVIN D. TILLER, Town Attorney



COUNCIL MEMBERS
A. DOYLE FIELDS
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M. ELIJAH LEONARD
W. BRADLEY LAMBERT

TOWN OF LEBANON

Telephone (276) 889-7200 Fax (276) 889-7208
485 West Main Street
P.O. Drawer 309
Lebanon, Virginia 24266

August 3, 2021

Mr. Mohamed G. Abbamin, MPA
Policy Manager
Virginia Department of Fire Programs
1005 Technology Park Drive
Glen Allen, Virginia 23059

RE: Comprehensive Analysis Study of Fire System Request – Town of Lebanon

Dear Mr. Abbamin;

This is to request the services of the Virginia Fire Services Board (VFSB) in conducting a complete and thorough review of the Town of Lebanon's Volunteer Fire Department.

This study has the support of the Town of Lebanon's Mayor and Town Council as shown by the attached resolution adopted at the Town of Lebanon regular monthly Town Council meeting August 16, 2021.

The requested areas of concentration of this study include:

- Organization
- Budget and Administration
- Training
- Delivery of Services
- Fleet Design and Management (Equipment/Apparatus)

It is the Town Council's proposal to have a complete and thorough review of the aforementioned areas of concentration and a comprehensive list of recommendations to enhance the delivery of services to the citizens of the Town of Lebanon.

Your Consideration of this request at the next available opportunity would be greatly appreciated. I am available to respond to any questions you might have regarding this request. I can be reached by phone at 276-889-7200 or by email at kblankenship@lebanonva.net.

Sincerely,



Kevin L. Blankenship, Town Manager

APPENDIX C

Scope of Study Agreement between the Virginia Fire Services Board and the Town of Lebanon



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Keith H. Johnson
VIRGINIA FIRE SERVICES
BOARD CHAIR

Virginia Department of Fire Programs

Scope of Fire and EMS Study Agreement

between the

Town of Lebanon

and the

Virginia Fire Services Board

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this agreement is to establish mutually accepted duties, responsibilities, and expectations between the Virginia Fire Services Board, its designated Fire and EMS Study Committee and the locality which has requested the Fire and EMS Study/Technical Assistance from the Virginia Fire Service Board. The agreement is provided to help define activities and expectations between both parties.

AGREEMENT

- Study results/recommendations shall be comprehensive in nature and shall be consistent with and organized according to a final revised scope of work as negotiated between the Study Committee and the locality prior to the formal commencement of the Study. ****Refer to Self-Assessment Questionnaire for Scope of Study.**
- While questions of staffing ratios, response time, capital equipment purchases, etc. are relevant to the Study process, the locality should not expect detailed recommendations in these areas beyond system-wide recommendations.
- Study Results will be openly presented to the elected/appointed governing body, the requesting agency as well as any additional requesting organization(s);

- The time frame noted for technical assistance will be accepted;
- All relevant organizational data will be made available to the study committee; and,
- Locality will provide to the Virginia Department of Fire Programs a central point of contact. Please ensure the contact is available Monday – Friday from 9 am to 5 pm, and nighttime and weekends as needed.
- Within 6 to 9 months of the Study completion, the Department of Fire Programs will email the locality a feedback follow-up survey. It is requested that the locality complete the survey so the Agency and Board can gain valuable in-sight into the success and areas of improvements for future studies. Your participation in the feedback survey is important to the Agency and Board.

REVIEW AND TERM

This agreement shall be in effect until the end of the Fire and EMS Study.

SIGNED

We do hereby acknowledge and agree to abide by the provisions of this Memorandum of Understanding.

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Chairman, Virginia Fire Services Board	Date
 <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin-top: 5px;"/>	<p style="text-align: center;">10/17/23</p> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin-top: 5px;"/>
Authorized Locality Representative	Date

APPENDIX D

Other resources available to the Lebanon Volunteer Fire Department and the Town of Lebanon

1. Manuals

- a. NVFC: Understanding & Implementing Standards: NFPA 1500,1720, and 1851
 - i. https://www.nvfc.org/resource_item/understanding-implementing-nfpa-standards-1500-1720-1851-english/
- b. NVFC: Understanding & Implementing Standards: NFPA 1407 and 1021
 - i. <https://www.nvfc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Standards-Guide-Vol2-1407-1021.pdf>
- c. NVFC: Psychologically Healthy Fire Departments Implementation Toolkit
 - i. <https://www.nvfc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/PHFD-Implementation-Toolkit.pdf>
- d. NVFC: What to expect: A Guide for Family Members of Volunteer Firefighters
Volunteer Fire Services Culture: Essential Strategies for Success
 - i. <https://www.nvfc.org/guide-for-family-members-of-volunteer-responders-now-available/>

2. Informational Sheets

- a. Training Volunteer Firefighters to be Combat Ready
 - i. Section 9: Developing and Implementing Training Best Practices
 - ii. Appendix B: Sample Knowledge and Skills Based Annual Training Topics Plan
 - iii. Appendix E: How to Use NFPA Standards To your Department's Advantage
 1. <https://www.iafc.org/docs/default-source/1vcos/operational-training-guide.pdf>
- b. The 16 Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives
 - i. <https://www.everyonegoeshome.com/16-initiatives/>
- c. VFIS: NFPA 1500 Fire Department Occupational Safety, Health and Wellness Program Worksheet (2018 Edition)
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