Short and Mid-Term Recommendations

The following list summarizes recommendations based on the individual agency evaluations contained within this report that are achievable in the short or mid-term, typically within a maximum of five years. These recommendations have been compiled into a prioritized list for easy reference. The prioritization system is as follows.

Priority 1 – Immediate Internal Safety

The recommendation deals with an improvement or initiative that solves an issue affecting the safety of firefighters and/or other personnel. These are not matters that simply make it easier to do a particular function but in fact make a currently unsafe situation safe.

- **No Priority 1 Recommendations**

Priority 2 – Legal or Financial Exposure

The recommendation resolves a situation that is creating or is likely to create the opportunity for legal action against the entity or its officials. It also may be a situation that could subject the entity to a significant expense.

- **The department should abandon the practice of voting for officer positions and implement a system of promotional testing for all positions.....25**
- **The city should work with the department to become more involved in the human resources element of the organization. If this cannot be accomplished, the city should sever its relationship with the department regarding personnel issues and classifying department members as city employees. 25**
- **The Police and Fire Commission should be leveraged to act as an unbiased board for assistance with human resources needs. 25**
- **ESCI recommends that the current Constitution and Bylaws for the Whitewater Volunteer Fire Department be rewritten to establish a single set of cohesive rules and regulations for membership, rules and regulations and disciplinary actions. 27**
- **The city should consult legal counsel on the department's practice of using the cities federal tax identification number to claim tax exempt status. 32**
- **The city should ensure that the department has accurately filed the appropriate tax forms for a reasonable historical period. 32**

- **The city should work with the department to reduce the fleet size by eliminating redundant apparatus, which will reduce insurance and operating costs. 37**
- **If the city is going to maintain insurance on all vehicles within the department, the city should be named on the title of each vehicle regardless of where funds came from to purchase it. 37**
- **The department should ensure all members are trained to the awareness level of each technical rescue discipline. 87**
- **Ensure all life safety rope and associated hardware have usage tracking logs as defined in *NFPA 1983*. 87**
- **Emergency Medical Dispatch (EMD) should be re-implemented in the communications center (may be staffing dependent). 92**

Priority 3 – Corrects a Service Delivery Issue

The recommendation addresses a service delivery situation that, while it does not create an immediate safety risk to personnel or the public, does affect the department's ability to deliver service in accordance with its standards of performance. For example, adding a response unit to compensate for a growing response workload or delivering training needed to allow personnel to deal effectively with emergency responses already being encountered.

- **The department should implement minimum qualifications that follow *NFPA 1001* for all personnel that will be actively engaged in structural firefighting. All personnel, including 'Rescue' personnel should undergo a pre-hire medical examination to ensure they are physically able to perform their required duties. 50**
- **The department should implement minimum qualifications to hold officer positions, regardless of division. 50**
- **All WFD personnel in all divisions should be trained to the First Responder Operations Level for hazardous materials. 50**
- **The existing contracts for the provision of fire and ambulance services should be combined into a single contract for the provision of all emergency services with the rural townships. 80**
- **The department should assign one or more individuals to be responsible for the Public Access Defibrillation (PAD) program and to ensure that all equipment is appropriate placed, tracked, equipped and maintained. 82**

- **The department should ensure that all Rescue/EMS personnel are adequately trained and able to perform the necessary skills they are expected to perform. 84**
- **The department should focus on achieving state certification for rescue services delivered, or develop a standardized in-house certification program that follows *NFPA 1670*. 87**
- **The department should re-evaluate its ability to realistically provide operations level confined space rescue 87**
- **The department should work with the city to ensure that all commercial construction plans are reviewed by the fire department prior to issuance of a permit. 90**
- **The communications center should implement quality performance measures for call pick-up and call processing in accordance with industry standards. 92**
- **The communications center should consider additional staff on each shift so that a higher degree of prioritization can be assigned to emergency incidents at dispatch. 92**

Priority 4 – Enhances the Delivery of a Service

The recommendation improves the delivery of a particular service. For example, relocating a fire station to improve response times to a particular part of town or adding a piece of equipment that will improve the delivery of a service.

- **Personnel that are not meeting their on-duty (signup) obligations should be placed on probation and/or terminated based on guidelines established within the department bylaws. 48**
- **The department should reconsider its policy of staffing ambulances with three personnel and ensure that personnel are properly training and experienced to handle and/or supervise a two-person crew. 48**
- **The department should continue the use of the box alarm system already in place and periodically review both internal and external physical and personnel resources to ensure that each card is up-to-date. 80**
- **The department should continue its focus on vehicle rescue and ensure it improves its capability for machinery rescue. 87**
- **Ensure operations level training is achieved by more members for rope and water rescue. 87**
- **Department personnel should work with the townships or the county to adopt and implement a formal fire code that applies to all properties within the department's jurisdiction. 90**

- **The city should consider hiring a full-time inspector to ensure that all commercial and multi-family rental occupancies are inspected on a regular basis following a formal inspection program. 90**
- **The department should work with both the city and the rural townships to implement a formal citation process for failure to follow fire code regulations. 90**
- **The department should work with the city and the county to establish a regional Juvenile Firesetter program. 90**
- **A formal quality assurance/improvement program should be developed for the communications center to ensure compliance with established performance measures.....92**
- **The city should investigate the potential for text messaging and alphanumeric paging of incidents to reduce repeated radio traffic from responders. 92**
- **The city should work with the communications center and the fire department to investigate technological advances that will assist with dispatch and resource utilization throughout the response area.....92**

Priority 5 – A Good Thing to Do

The recommendation does not fit within any of the above priorities but is still worth doing and can enhance the department's morale or efficiency.

- **The department should work with the city to develop a formal strategic plan to identify mid-term goals and objectives that address the department's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges/threats. 29**
- **All department officers should meet monthly to establish short-timer goals for the future and report on the status of those goals at the subsequent meeting.....29**
- **The city/department should implement an officer stipend program to compensate officers for their non-operational administrative and support duties and responsibilities. 44**
- **The department should work with local medical direction to develop and implement a formal quality assurance/quality improvement program that provides feedback to field responders and allows for the direction of future training needs.....83**
- **All department personnel should receive formal training on scene control and evidence collection/quarantine.....90**
- **Formal fire investigators should continue their formal education through the National Fire Academy and International Association of Arson Investigators (IAAI). 90**

Fiscal Considerations

Given the preceding strategies and recommendations, ESCI has the responsibility to provide the City of Whitewater with certain projections of what any future service delivery models may cost. This section is intended to provide fiscal guidance related to future facilities, apparatus and personnel based on the project team's recommendations.

Apparatus

Several apparatus have been identified as being potentially redundant and should be considered for non-replacement. A number of these apparatus are not owned by the city, thus, changes to these specific apparatus would not impact the city's financial responsibilities to the fire department. Other apparatus, however, such as the fourth ambulance, could be eliminated from the current fleet and saving realized from a reduction in insurance, fuel and maintenance. The city already has a capital improvement plan in place and should continue to fund that plan based on the previously established criteria.

Staffing

The costs of any changes to the current staffing model will vary based on the type of system implemented moving forward. For the purposes of this report, ESCI has researched current practices and rates of pay for certain positions in order to provide the city with at least some level of guidance regarding future staffing costs.

The first and foremost position that would ensure the sustainability and accountability for the fire department, regardless of what future path is followed, is that of a Fire Chief. While ESCI is not necessarily recommending that a full-time Fire Chief be hired by the city, this position could be used to oversee any transition to an alternative service delivery model and would serve as the direct link between the city and fire department as an organization. The figure below provides policymakers with an estimate of the total cost of a full-time fire chief based on regional information should the decision be made to move in this direction.

Figure 60: Example Fire Chief Compensation[13]

	Regional Median
Base Salary	$67,751
Benefits	
Social Security	$5,183
401k/403b	$2,575
Disability	$474
Healthcare	$6,507
Pension	$4,336
Paid Time Off (PTO)	$8,339
Total Compensation	**$95,165**

It is presumed that the position of Fire Chief would be a full-time city employee but this could just as easily be accomplished with a part-time position as well given the current staffing structure of the department. If the department moves forward with full-time or other on-duty staffing scenarios, it may benefit the city to have an individual charged with overseeing those personnel on a day-to-day basis.

Figure 61: Example Emergency Medical Technician Compensation[14]

	Regional Median
Base Salary	$29,410
Benefits	
Social Security	$2,250
401k/403b	$1,118
Disability	$206
Healthcare	$6,507
Pension	$1,882
Paid Time Off (PTO)	$3,620
Total Compensation	**$44,997**

[13] Obtained from http://swz.salary.com/salarywizard/Fire-Chief-Salary-Details-Whitewater-WI.aspx?hdcbxbonuse=off&isshowpiechart=true&isshowjobchart=false&isshowsalarydetailcharts=false&isshownextsteps=false&isshowcompanyfct=false&isshowaboutyou=false. Accessed 3 September 2013.

[14] Obtained from http://swz.salary.com/salarywizard/Emergency-Medical-Technician-Salary-Details-Whitewater-WI.aspx?hdcbxbonuse=off&isshowpiechart=true&isshowjobchart=false&isshowsalarydetailcharts=false&isshownextsteps=false&isshowcompanyfct=false&isshowaboutyou=false. Accessed 3 September 2013.

The median hourly rate for an Emergency Medical Technician is reported to be approximately $14. This compares to the current rate of $17.50 - $20.00 per hour in addition to an $8.00 flat fee for a response and $1.00 per hour to be on-call. The figure below illustrates how an EMT-Paramedic compares.

Figure 62: Example EMT-Paramedic Compensation[15]

	Regional Median
Base Salary	$36,833
Benefits	
Social Security	$2,822
401k/403b	$1,402
Disability	$258
Healthcare	$6,507
Pension	$2,361
Paid Time Off (PTO)	$4,540
Total Compensation	**$54,777**

The median hourly rate for an Emergency Medical Technician - Paramedic is reported to be approximately $18. WFD does not currently use EMT-Paramedic personnel within the department but, rather, relies on these personnel to respond from surrounding agencies in 'ALS Intercept' vehicles. Much discussion has been undertaken about the potential need for Advanced Life Support (ALS) or EMT-Paramedic personnel in the City of Whitewater and little in the way of hard evidence supports or contradicts those that support that need.

The nearest and most frequently used paramedic-level service is located at Fort Atkinson Memorial Hospital and these personnel, on-duty 24-hours per day, respond to Whitewater in an ALS Intercept vehicle, not a transport ambulance. If transport is necessary, the EMT-Paramedic simply moves his ALS equipment onto the WFD ambulance and attends the patient to the hospital in conjunction with WFD personnel. Based on the quickest route from Fort Atkinson Memorial Hospital to the City of Whitewater, the distance is approximately 10.3 miles and, in normal traffic, can take up to 15 minutes of travel time, not including the amount of time necessary for the personnel to leave the emergency department and make their way to the response vehicle.

[15] Obtained from http://swz.salary.com/salarywizard/EMT-Paramedic-Salary-Details-Whitewater-WI.aspx?hdcbxbonuse=off&isshowpiechart=true&isshowjobchart=false&isshowsalarydetailcharts=false&isshownextsteps=false&isshowcompanyfct=false&isshowaboutyou=false. Accessed 3 September 2013.

In addition, the ALS Intercept is not always immediately dispatched to incidents within the WFD response area since no Emergency Medical Dispatch or other prioritization of 911 calls is in place. This can further delay ALS response. To bridge this deficiency, all personnel within WFD (EMS/Rescue division) will be credentialed to the Advanced EMT level in the near future. This advanced credential will allow the department to provide a higher level of care but still does not reach the level of EMT-Paramedic. Whether or not the community *needs* paramedic-level care is a question that policymakers must ask their constituents and then ensure that the community is both able and willing to pay for that level of service to be provided.

DHS 110.50 requires that an EMT-Basic transport ambulance be staffed with at least one EMT-Basic and one EMT-Basic with a training permit. In addition, the rule requires that an EMT- Intermediate transport ambulance be staffed with at least one EMT-Intermediate and one EMT-Basic. For a paramedic transport ambulance, the rule requires that the ambulance be staffed with at least one EMT-Paramedic and one EMT-Basic. In regards to staffing of additional resources, the rule states that, "...An ambulance service provider may only deviate from the ambulance staffing requirements under sub. (1) if all 9-1-1 response ambulances are busy and the service has an approved reserve ambulance vehicle and one of the following conditions apply: ...An ambulance service provider may staff and operate reserve ambulances at a lower service level appropriate to the licensure level of the available staff if it obtains approval from the department. The reserve or back-up ambulance shall be stocked and equipped appropriately for the level of service provided. The ambulance service provider shall request approval through submission of an operational plan amendment."[16]

In other words, if the city/department wishes to implement an advanced level of care to ensure that either Advanced EMT or EMT-Paramedic personnel are available within the primary response area, it can do so with the establishment of a single ALS provider (AEMT or EMT-Paramedic) partnered with a BLS provider (EMT-Basic) in the primary response ambulance and provide BLS (EMT-Basic) services to all subsequent simultaneous incidents, if approved to do so by the State of Wisconsin. This may help the city/department to accomplish it goal of provided an advanced level of care while doing so in a cost effective manner.

To summarize, if the city were to move ahead with the implementation of a full-time Fire Chief as well as 24-hour ALS coverage, supplemented by duty personnel or other POC staffing, an annual cost of

[16] Wisconsin Department of Human Services regulation 110.50.

approximately $301,000 could be expected. This includes the Fire Chief and 3.75 FTE's for 24-hour EMT-Paramedic coverage, accounting for absences and use of PTO. This also presumes that the BLS personnel will continue to be compensated accordingly and that on-call personnel are transitioned to duty personnel through one of the strategies noted above. This type of system could also consider the use of a smaller vehicle for ALS first response with the transport ambulance responding later using the current on-call staffing methodology.

Facilities

The most difficult projection to make in this project is that of facilities due to the variables that may or may not come into play regarding apparatus and/or staffing changes in the future. As already mentioned, a number of apparatus could be removed from the fleet, which would reduce the space requirements within the apparatus bays at the current station. This space could be utilized to improve flow within the apparatus area itself or could be repurposed to provide for living areas for student, resident, peak demand or full-time personnel. The current station is not suitable for continuous staffing and any changes to the staffing model will require at least some level of renovation. At this time, the costs of those renovations cannot be estimated.

Cost Avoidance and Recovery Efforts

Given the current methods of billing for transports, the city could potentially increase overall revenue by increasing the level of service provided. Under the current practice, ambulance transports are billed by the city with estimated total revenue in 2012 of $550,000 based on an established fee schedule through the city. This translates into approximately $489.32 per incident in 2012. Understanding that not all incidents result in a transport, the actual per transport rate would be much higher. Under the current system, the department can only bill for certain types of transports. If a patient requires paramedic level care and a paramedic intercept is summoned to assist with the transport, then the paramedic provider bills for the transport and pays WFD a set amount for providing the vehicle.

If WFD were to enhance their level of service to paramedic, many more transports could be billed according to the ALS rates spelled out in the city's fee schedule. This could help to increase overall revenue for the department in regards to ambulance transports and help to offset the costs of providing the higher level of service.

Conclusion

The department as it stands today, while providing services that meet the community's expectations, has several issues that must be resolved for simple sustainability. The City of Whitewater has no oversight or management capacity within the current governance structure and has several options moving forward to correct this deficiency. The most critical need until a final decision is made regarding future governance is the establishment of a formal contract between the city and WFD. This, in and of itself, may be difficult without the fire department first establishing itself as a legal corporation with the State of Wisconsin. ESCI would suggest that the city work with legal counsel to assist the fire department in accomplishing this task and then formalizing a contract for services that includes specific performance measures and financial auditing requirements. Without this contract, the city faces significant legal liability.

Another option for the city is to relinquish all responsibility for fire protection and EMS throughout the response area and delegate this authority and responsibility to WFD. This would entail abandoning the current practice of recognizing WFD personnel as city employees, halting the practice of paying for apparatus, equipment and insurance and transferring ownership of all current apparatus and equipment to the fire department once it is legally established with the Wisconsin Department of State, Corporations Division. A contract would still need to be established an executed between the city and the fire department that includes the same performance measures and financial auditing requirements mentioned previously.

The final option for the city is much more drastic but would resolve a number of issues that currently exist; severing the existing relationship with WFD and creating a municipal fire department. Since the city already owns the facility and a majority of the apparatus and equipment and currently recognizes fire department personnel as city employees, this strategy would allow the city to maintain greater management and organizational control over the department. Existing issues relating to hiring, termination, discipline, etc. would be handled through the city's personnel office and all financial duties and responsibilities would be handled through the city's finance director. In the future, all contracts for service, even in the rural areas, would be negotiated and financed through the city rather than the existing volunteer fire department. This type of structure would ensure that personnel in management positions within the organization met minimum qualifications and requirements and would eliminate the existing practice of voting on supervisory positions, as well as new personnel.

The current apparatus fleet should be further evaluated to ensure that sufficient apparatus are available without unnecessary redundancy. All apparatus should be available for all incident responses rather than selective incidents based on geographic location.

As a means of improving response performance, particularly for EMS/Rescue responses, the city/department should seriously consider station duty, resident or enhanced student programs to provide for a more stable availability of personnel. After an adequate period of time, the program should be re-evaluated to determine its effectiveness before moving to a more expensive paid part-time or full-time staffing model.

Regardless of the strategy chosen by the city for the future of Whitewater Fire Department, each recommendation presented throughout this report is still relevant and can be applied to each scenario. The ESCI project team began collecting data and information for this project in May of this year and the review and analysis necessary to complete this project has taken nearly four months. It is ESCI's sincere hope that the information presented in this document is found to be useful for policymakers as they contemplate the future of WFD. In addition, it is the hope of the project team that the members of WFD use the information contained within this document to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the services they provide such that the system is sustainable well into the future.