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Burnsville Fire Department Strategic Plan

Final Draft for Adoption by the Department

August 9, 2021

**Strategic Planning Facilitated by
Ethical Leaders in Action**

Introduction

Burnsville Departmental leadership recently engaged personnel across the agency in a strategic planning process to guide both strategic investment and some day-to-day operating decisions over the next 3-5 years. This document is the result of those efforts. The strategic plan was developed in accordance with the following principles:

1. The strategic initiatives are based on a thoughtful, internal assessment of the strategic status of the BFD, as articulated in the plan. Each initiative and all efforts are to be focused on achieving meaningful improvement in one or more of the following respects:
 - a. **Excellence in Service Delivery.** This includes the BFD's readiness and capacity, and is intended to include all aspects of service delivery, from risk prevention and public education through emergency medical services and fire/rescue responses.
 - b. **Sound Stewardship of Public Resources.** Investments are to be aligned with real benefits to the community, and made in ways that manage costs and benefits, short and long-term.
 - c. **Fairness.** This includes advancing principles of justice and equity with respect to all stakeholders. Fairness also requires appropriate transparency and accountability in leadership at all levels of the department. Finally, the strategic plan recognizes firefighter safety and wellness as critical values.
2. **We are focused on feasible initiatives with a sharp focus on the next 3-5 years and a much longer-range view of the department, as well.** The BFD recognizes that its departmental priorities must be considered within the broader context of the City's needs and plans. This plan contemplates longer-range implications for all initiatives, but projections are limited to a more foreseeable time horizon. These initiatives are also consistent with the BFD's current Standard of Response Coverage ("SOC"), which will remain in effect during the timeframe of this strategic plan.
3. **The final strategy must reflect the perspectives of departmental leaders at all levels (including union leadership and internal subject matter experts).** This strategic planning effort was led by the Organizational Improvement Committee (OIC). The Fire Chief and leadership team are ultimately accountable for the content of this plan, and for leading in its implementation. At the same time, effective implementation requires cooperation from multiple stakeholders and, in some instances, from every member of the department. Therefore, the plan itself was informed by broad departmental input.

Strategic Planning Process Overview

Our aim was to develop a substantive strategic plan that reflects the thoughtful input of virtually all members of the department. The Organizational Improvement Committee (OIC), which comprises all ranks and divisions of the department, led in generation of the strategic plan, with executive support from departmental command. An outside consultant, Charles Weinstein of Ethical Leaders in Action, conducted an initial session with the OIC to frame the project, and then conducted interactive, working sessions with:

- Firefighters and officers on each shift, including time with firefighters alone.
- The entire fire prevention team.
- Chief officers.
- The OIC as a multi-level input group.

Each discussion following the shifts and Fire Prevention included increasingly specific “hypotheses” for discussion. This report is the result of this process of broad inquiry followed by thoughtful narrowing of focus. It is also explicitly consistent with the BFD SOC, which was accepted by the Burnsville City Council in April 2021.

This report consists of the following sections:

1. This **Introduction**, including the Table of Contents, below.
2. A statement of the BFD’s well-established **Mission and Organizational Values**
3. **Strategic Situation Summary and SLOT Analysis**
4. **Strategic Objectives and Initiatives**
5. **Conclusion**

This is intended to be an internal document, without the layout and graphic treatments associated with a document for public distribution.

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Burnsville Fire Department Mission and Values

Departmental command and the OIC determined at the beginning of the process that we would not revise the departmental mission and values as part of this process, but we would inquire of department members whether there was a substantial desire among firefighters and officers to do so. Participants generally endorsed the current mission and values; there was no stated desire to revise them at this time.

The general level of support for the departmental mission and values makes these concepts an excellent foundation for the strategic plan. As will be noted below, the SLOT analysis was formulated in terms of the department's ability to pursue its mission in accordance with its values. The impact of potential strategic initiative was likewise considered in these terms.

Mission Statement

The Burnsville Fire Department is dedicated to providing efficient and effective Fire, Medical, Rescue, and Prevention Services of the highest quality

Values Statement:

The Burnsville Fire Department operates with a commitment to personal and organizational Character, Communication, Collaboration and Competent excellence.



Strategic Situation Summary and SLOT Analysis

Overview

The Burnsville Fire department is dedicated to community risk reduction and all-hazard response, including emergency medical services (EMS) at the level of advanced life support (ALS). The City and surrounding areas include a full range of public and private occupancies, from large retail and heavy industry to houses of worship, schools and clinics, storefronts, and other small businesses. Housing stock is equally diverse, including single-family and multi-unit housing, as well as assisted and congregate living facilities built over many decades. The surrounding area includes the Minnesota River and some smaller lakes and waterways, as well as wetlands and other rough terrain. Burnsville Fire participates in the Dakota County Special Operations Team (SOT) for technical rescue and hazardous materials response. As is the norm in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area, BFD works closely with neighboring departments as auto- and mutual-aid partners in fire suppression and larger incident responses. Joint trainings are conducted on a regular basis, though there is room to expand those practices.

BFD is a generally high-performing organization. The department is highly committed to fire prevention and public education as community risk reduction strategies. BFD has also earned its regional reputation as an outstanding provider of emergency medical services, and as an employer of choice for highly skilled paramedic-firefighters who want to work hard answering calls, training, and otherwise maintaining a high state of readiness. The breadth of participation and thoughtful input from department members during this strategic planning process was an indicator of a high level of staff engagement and a general desire to participate in setting the department's direction. The greatest opportunity for workforce improvements is to achieve greater diversification to reflect the community more fully. This is a known challenge for Burnsville Fire Department (as it is for most public safety agencies).

The department is generally well-equipped and will soon benefit from a new station, currently under construction. That fully purpose-built facility will include housing, training, fitness, and vehicle and equipment spaces designed to contribute to readiness, firefighter wellness, and efficiency of emergency response. The department also has some structural limitations: the two-station footprint affects emergency response time, and budget-driven staffing limitations and increasing call volumes can be taxing on crews. More important, the current staffing levels limit the resources available for responding to fires, especially when concurrent medical runs are underway. As noted above, it is well understood that fire suppression operations in Twin Cities suburbs are conducted by multiple departments under automatic aid and mutual aid agreements.

Each of the above topics is described in more detail in the following factor analysis.

SLOT Analysis

Input from department members directly informed the following SLOT analysis, which describes the status of department relative to the above strategic mission and values. (A more common acronym is SWOT, where "limitations" is replaced by "weaknesses.")

- **Strengths** – Factors internal to BFD that contribute to its ability to achieve its mission.
- **Limitations** – Factors internal to BFD that inhibit, limit, or threaten its ability to achieve that mission. Traditionally called "weaknesses."
- **Opportunities** - Factors primarily outside BFD that promote or contribute to success. These function as "tailwinds."
- **Threats** - Factors primarily outside BFD that tend to inhibit success. These function as "headwinds."

In a very meaningful sense, this SLOT analysis represents a consensus of how department stakeholders see the organization. As such, it is intended to serve as a baseline for discussion of strategic priorities, and to inform operational

decisions, as well. Even as these factors change over time, grounding leadership discussions in the mission and circumstances of the BFD is a useful technique for focusing all participants on a shared perspective of the department.

Strengths

- **Fully capable EMS agency**

All firefighters and company officers are also paramedics. This provides flexibility in staffing and deployment, as all personnel are equipped to play all roles in a medical response, in addition to their roles in responding to other calls. Medical direction is strong, and personnel are trained and equipped to perform “at the top of their licenses.” They are also trained and socialized to provide compassionate care, treating each patient as a good neighbor – and as they would want a family member to be treated. Personnel take justified pride in the manner in which EMS services are delivered.

- **Highly skilled and engaged firefighters**

The department’s capabilities are due primarily to a culture of performance and a high level of mutual support among employees at all levels. This is the result of multiple factors. Workforce quality begins with the department’s hiring and onboarding practices, including leaders’ willingness to use the probationary employment period to truly assess suitability of the employees.

Even in a challenging period for recruitment nationwide, BFD continues to attract excellent candidates. Further evidence of the strength of the workforce can be found in the number of Burnsville “alumni” serving as fire chiefs and other chief officers in multiple other departments.

- **Well-Equipped**

The department is well-equipped with a highly capable fleet and the right tools for their full scope of practice. The new station will add facilities and design features that further increase readiness, efficiency of response, and firefighter wellness.

- **Mutual and automatic aid partnerships**

BFD is prepared - equipped and trained - for effective joint responses with neighboring departments. Recurring joint training at the shared ABLE Center further supports continued readiness. As noted below, while effective joint response is truly a BFD strength, it also represents an opportunity for continued development.

- **Strategic**

BFD is strategy-driven, working under both a standard of cover and a strategic plan. Each of these frameworks are built and maintained with a high degree of input, with members of all ranks contributing to setting direction and to continuous improvement.

- **Committed to safety and wellness**

The City and the Fire Department have demonstrated a commitment to protect the safety and wellness of department members with multiple investments, such as useful fitness equipment and spaces at the stations, use of two sets of turnout gear and specialized cleaning equipment, and the ongoing implementation of cancer risk reduction measures. The new fire station design reflects many best practices for firefighter wellness, and the BFD’s investments in training reflects its commitment to safety and wellness as well as in operational effectiveness and efficiency.

Limitations

- **Budget-driven staffing limitations**

Operational staffing often limits the department's fire suppression and emergency response, especially with concurrent medical calls in progress. This requires the department to implement time-delayed tactics for fireground operations while relying heavily on mutual aid partners. Staffing also limits community risk reduction efforts, as firefighters are often not available for public education or community engagement duties.

As noted in the BFD's SOC document, call volumes continue to increase at rates that far outstrip departmental staffing, especially on-shift staffing. This exacerbates the above-noted operational limitations. It also contributes to some stress among responders who naturally want to have all the resources necessary to achieve the best possible outcomes in response to any emergency incident.

- **Geography**

The BFD's two-station footprint in a community with Burnsville's geography leads to longer response times in some areas. As a practical matter, some residents or businesses must wait longer for emergency assistance by virtue of their distance from a fire station. The limitations of this footprint can be seen in the City's ISO rating split 3/10, with areas of the city within five road miles of a station rated at 3, and the areas not within five road miles rated at 10.

- **Limited Scope of Practice**

BFD's strategic focus on a narrower scope of practice – community risk management, EMS, fire suppression, and core rescue capabilities such as vehicle extractions and water rescue – means that the department is reliant on the Dakota County Special Operations Team (DC SOT) for most technical rescue. This entails some delay in getting resources on scene as compared to deploying those resources "in house." However, realistically it would be the case that on any given shift, off-duty internal personnel would have to be called, resulting in a similar (or greater) delay. For this reason and others, reliance on shared teams like DC SOT is the norm for departments like BFD.

- **Demographics**

While the BFD workforce is undoubtedly a strength as noted above, at least two demographic factors reflect limitations, as well. First, the department is less diverse in terms of gender and ethnicity than it might be, making it less reflective of the community it serves. This is a known challenge for all agencies. Second, the mix of fire and life experience levels among staff members poses some challenges for training, assuring that the topics and design of training meet a broad range of developmental goals.

Opportunities

- **Relationships**

Strong relationships with other agencies, including the Burnsville Police Department, facilitate excellent service delivery and often contribute to building stronger relationships in the communities the BFD serves. The department trains regularly with its mutual aid partners and is regarded as a leader among those departments.

- **Redevelopment increases safety**

While Burnsville has historically had many structures that were vulnerable to fire due to their age and design (for example, multi-unit residential buildings without sprinkler systems), redevelopment of city real estate is leading to safer, better protected occupancies.

- **Civic support**

The Burnsville Fire Department can pursue its mission in part due to a consistently supportive City Council that values public safety as well as the community risk reduction and community development efforts of the department.

Threats

- **Recruitment challenges**

The Burnsville Fire Department is not immune from nationwide challenges recruiting qualified candidates eager to do the work. Thus far hiring efforts have been successful, but the department must plan for increasing challenges in this area, particularly given BFD's commitment to diversify a highly capable workforce.

- **Health care system limitations, especially for mental and behavioral health**

Many of BFD's EMS calls are primarily or entirely related to behavioral or mental health. Too often, after BFD personnel safely treat and transport these patients, resources are not available to address the underlying problems that give rise to the emergencies. These systemic gaps pose an existential challenge for BFD's mission to *provide efficient and effective... (medical) services... of the highest quality.*

- **Occupancies without sprinklers**

Historically in Burnsville, approximately half of fires occur in multi-family residential buildings. While redevelopment represents an opportunity to enhance safety, Burnsville is still home to many apartment buildings that do not have fire sprinkler systems. Those systems would otherwise protect residents and property, so buildings are inherently less safe without them.

- **Diverse needs for community risk reduction services**

The diversity of the City of Burnsville is in nearly every respect a strength, contributing to community vitality and the richness of life, and affording opportunities for members of all communities to thrive in Burnsville. This is especially true for the immigrant communities and individuals who now call Burnsville home. The Department and its people genuinely feel proud and delighted to serve these communities. At the same time, community risk reduction requires cooperation and even partnership with multiple stakeholders. For example, a fire stop or smoke alarm can save a lives only after being installed in a home. They do no good at all on a fire department shelf. Some residents are not yet comfortable working with a government entity to take such steps. Without due care, language barriers might likewise hamper these important interactions. The BFD is committed to providing services in a culturally competent way, and to continuing to build the relationships necessary to effectively serve all members of the Burnsville Community. Doing so sometimes presents real but surmountable challenges.

The strategic initiatives framed in the following section are intended to guide the actions that will help BFD pursue its mission in light of the strategic factors described above.

Strategic Objectives and Initiatives

The Burnsville Fire Department is committed to deep professionalism: to delivering the highest quality of service with attention to integrity, effective communication, collaboration, and continuous improvement. Delivering on this commitment requires ongoing investment; it pays off directly in terms of lives and property saved, risks averted, and problems addressed. Indirect benefits include the contribution of public safety to community vitality and lower costs to the public from efficient delivery of services and sound risk management. Given the day-to-day demands on the department, resources for pursuing strategic initiatives are inherently limited. Thus, the determination of *what to do* – or what to do *first* – and *how to do it* are core strategic considerations.

The Organizational Improvement Committee used the following principles for selecting and framing strategic initiatives. Every strategic initiative is to be:

- Oriented toward achieving the mission of the BFD.
- Supportive of a culture of high performance and mutual support.
- Established at an appropriate scope and scale for available resources.
- Data-driven in its intent, and in its implementation.
- Feasible, based on measurable or clearly observable outcomes.
- Supported by outside funding when possible.

Each initiative will be further developed into project plans and assigned to teams, with leadership accountable for implementation.

The Burnsville Fire Department will pursue the following strategic initiatives in the next 2-3 years.

1. **Mental Health Care System Innovation**

BFD will lead and partner with other agencies and entities to improve the way that patients are cared for after BFD's emergency care. This is by far the most ambitious of the strategic initiatives and will require the development and enhancement of multiple institutional relationships for its realization. Given the current set of challenges, the potential benefit to the community is likewise enormous.

2. **Enhanced On-shift Staffing**

Strive to increase staffing even in light of the City's fiscal limitations and consistent with a shared commitment to cost containment.

3. **Multifaceted Community Risk Reduction**

BFD will investigate and pursue improvements likely to achieve measurable gains in community safety. Areas for improvement likely include:

- a. Public health community risk reduction, through creative interventions.
- b. Fully developing online programs and resources for public education and community risk reduction.
- c. Focusing education services on those likely to inadvertently start fires.

4. Continuous Improvement of Operations

BFD will engage operational leaders at all levels to identify and implement small and larger changes that improve the effectiveness and efficiency of operations. Ideas include:

- a. Tactics and practices for more rapid response to fire calls in cross-staffed scenarios.
- b. Improved integration of Community Risk Reduction and Operations personnel.

5. Enhancements to Firefighter Wellness Practices

BFD will continue to pursue its commitment to comprehensive firefighter wellness, including fitness and especially cardiac health, cancer risk reduction, and mental health.

Each of these is described in terms of overall objectives and high-level tasks. Full project plans with teams, timelines, milestones, and performance indicators will be developed as the first stage of implementing this strategic plan.

These initiatives are framed to be flexible; most include key decisions that will affect how the initiatives are to be pursued. This uncertainty is intentional; our aim is to continue to learn throughout implementation of our plans, and to adjust course based on that learning. Moreover, the department recognizes a high level of dependency on outside factors for the achievement of many objectives: this may include funding, as well as cooperation from other stakeholders. For these reasons, flexibility is a built-in feature of this strategic plan.

Initiative 1: Mental Health Care System Innovation

Overall Objective:

Our current health care delivery systems fail too many patients who need help with mental and behavioral health. This, in turn, leads many of these same patients – community members – to repeatedly call 911 when they are in crisis. No single entity can effectively address this challenge, but by working together, multiple agencies and institutions can make a difference. One critical factor in engaging these players is leadership to convene and coordinate a process of thoughtful research, planning, and productive change.

BFD will attempt to function as a leader in a multilateral effort to improve the delivery of mental health care services, with the goal of impacting outcomes for patients who seek emergency medical care (or would otherwise have done so, were it not for the changes that this group implements). Key measures of success will include patient outcomes and reduction in utilization of EMS services for recurring behavioral health issues.

Major tasks:

- a. Define the problem and the stakeholders involved.
- b. Engage stakeholders in a situation summary and visioning process.
- c. Define a clear vision for more effective regional health care to meet emergent, acute, and chronic care needs.
- d. Seek funding and other necessary resources.
- e. Research and learn from examples.
- f. Develop plans for desired changes.
- g. Implement any changes within BFD; support other entities in implementing changes as appropriate.
- h. Measure and communicate success.

Initiative 2: Enhanced Staffing

Overall Objective:

Achieving the mission of the BFD in the City's "moments of truth" requires adequate staffing. The Department relies on highly professional employees, sound practices, and excellent equipment to assure the best response possible consistent with employee safety. Additional staffing has the potential to improve response outcomes while contributing to firefighter safety on-scene and firefighter wellness overall. Needs are quantified in the BFD's Standards of Cover document.

The City of Burnsville will continue to operate in a manner consistent with fiscal restraint. Even within this environment, the BFD will seek to increase staffing first to increase the percentage of time in which the City is covered above minimum staffing levels (and the corresponding overtime demands required to remain at minimums) and then to increase staffing levels primarily to allow for a more effective fire suppression response.

Major Tasks:

The major tasks associated with this initiative remain to be determined. The Department continues to make use of available grant funding for all aspects of operations and will continue to engage with the City's overall budgeting processes to secure the best available funding for human resources.

Initiative 3: Multifaceted Community Risk Reduction

Overall Objective:

Use sound data and research to identify and define opportunities to improve community health and safety through targeted risk reduction efforts and implement programs to achieve those goals. Current thinking suggests three potential areas for feasible programs that could deliver high impact:

- Community health risk reduction through direct intervention on a flexible basis, e.g., using personnel on light duty. This eliminates the overhead of more formal “Community Paramedicine” programs but seeks some of the same benefits in a way that aligns better with BFD’s operations and staffing.
- Building on current (limited) efforts to create social media-driven resources and programs for community risk reduction.
- Targeting populations shown to be more likely to start fires accidentally with education to raise awareness and persuade these individuals to avoid risky behavior (e.g., smoking alone while intoxicated).

Major tasks:

- a. Research to define, quantify, and prioritize opportunities. Secure funding and necessary resources as appropriate.
- b. Engage with community health care partners to explore the nature and feasibility of a structured, flexible program to intervene with patients/residents to improve health outcomes.
- c. Secure and engage resources for online efforts. This may also involve collaboration with the City, or with other agencies.
- d. Develop and launch relevant programs.

Initiative 4: Continuous Improvement of Operations

Overall Objective:

Continue to identify and implement measures that result in more effective and efficient emergency response, especially with respect to fire suppression. One idea cited as a potential area for improvement includes very tactical changes to how firefighters transition from medical to fire apparatus when responding to calls. This is but one example of potential changes that can be identified, studied, and implemented. The transition to a new station will provide many opportunities for operational improvements. These changes will require creative thought and the implementation of new practices throughout the organization.

A second area for development includes better integration of community risk reduction and fire suppression personnel. Fire inspections are conducted by dedicated firefighters who are also called on to respond to larger incidents. Including these team members in more training, especially across multiple shifts, has the potential to increase firefighter safety and efficacy during real fire response. By the same token, on-shift firefighters conduct pre-plan occupancy visits, and must be able to identify fire safety issues in those premises. Firefighters also participate in *ad hoc* and planned community education events. There may be opportunities to increase their effectiveness in these community risk reduction functions through training, as well.

Major tasks:

- a. Convene company officers, community risk reduction personnel, and on-duty crews in structured discussions to identify opportunities for improvement.
- b. Assign team members to:
 - a. Observe operations in light of identified potential improvements.
 - b. Research other agencies or otherwise seek learning from outside the department.
- c. Use the OIC as a forum for to capture, study, and lead in implementing desired changes. Authority flows through the chain of command. Teams and individuals across the department will be involved in generating ideas, refining plans, and implementing changes.
- d. Assess impact of changes and adjust, as necessary.

Initiative 5: Enhancements to Firefighter Wellness Program

Overall Objective:

Optimize all aspects of the department for firefighter safety and wellness, as aligned with the pursuit of BFD's mission.

Major tasks:

- a. Continue to implement cancer risk reduction measures in call response, e.g., effective on-scene decontamination and management of gear to reduce in-cab exposure.
- b. Build effective training into the transition to the new station to assure that good habits are adopted from the beginning. Adapt these new changes in practice to Station 2.
- c. Partner with MNFire and other agencies to provide effective mental and behavioral health supports to all team members. Continue implementation of peer support teams and engagement of an in-house mental health professional for prevention and early intervention.
- d. Continue to promote functional fitness, along with both personal and shared accountability for physical readiness and resiliency.
- e. Measure and report outcomes.

Conclusion

This strategic plan reflects thoughtful input from the entire department. Every shift and team contributed their ideas, and the Organizational Improvement Committee and the Command Staff led in the framing and revision of the strategic assessment and initiatives. The plan is also aligned with the department's current Standards of Cover, which is informed by industry standards and best practices. Ethical Leaders in Action, Inc. facilitated this process in partnership with the OIC and the Fire Chief. This internally focused approach was chosen for the sake of efficiency; this is intended to be a relatively short-term strategic plan.

This plan is a living document. As the strategy is implemented, new opportunities will emerge. The department anticipates that implementation will be flexible in terms of both direction and pace, driven in part by the availability of resources (including staff time) and by the demands of day-to-day duties and responsibilities.

The Burnsville Fire Department is an integral part of the City of Burnsville. This departmental strategy is intended to be fully consistent with the City's strategic direction, oriented toward pursuit of the BFD's distinctive mission. The Fire Department stands ready, as always, to guide our strategic implementation to best meet the needs of the broader community. The Department's purpose, as always, is to provide efficient and effective Fire, Medical, Rescue, and Prevention Services of the highest quality. Department members are committed to doing so in ways that augment and align with the other excellent services provided by the City.