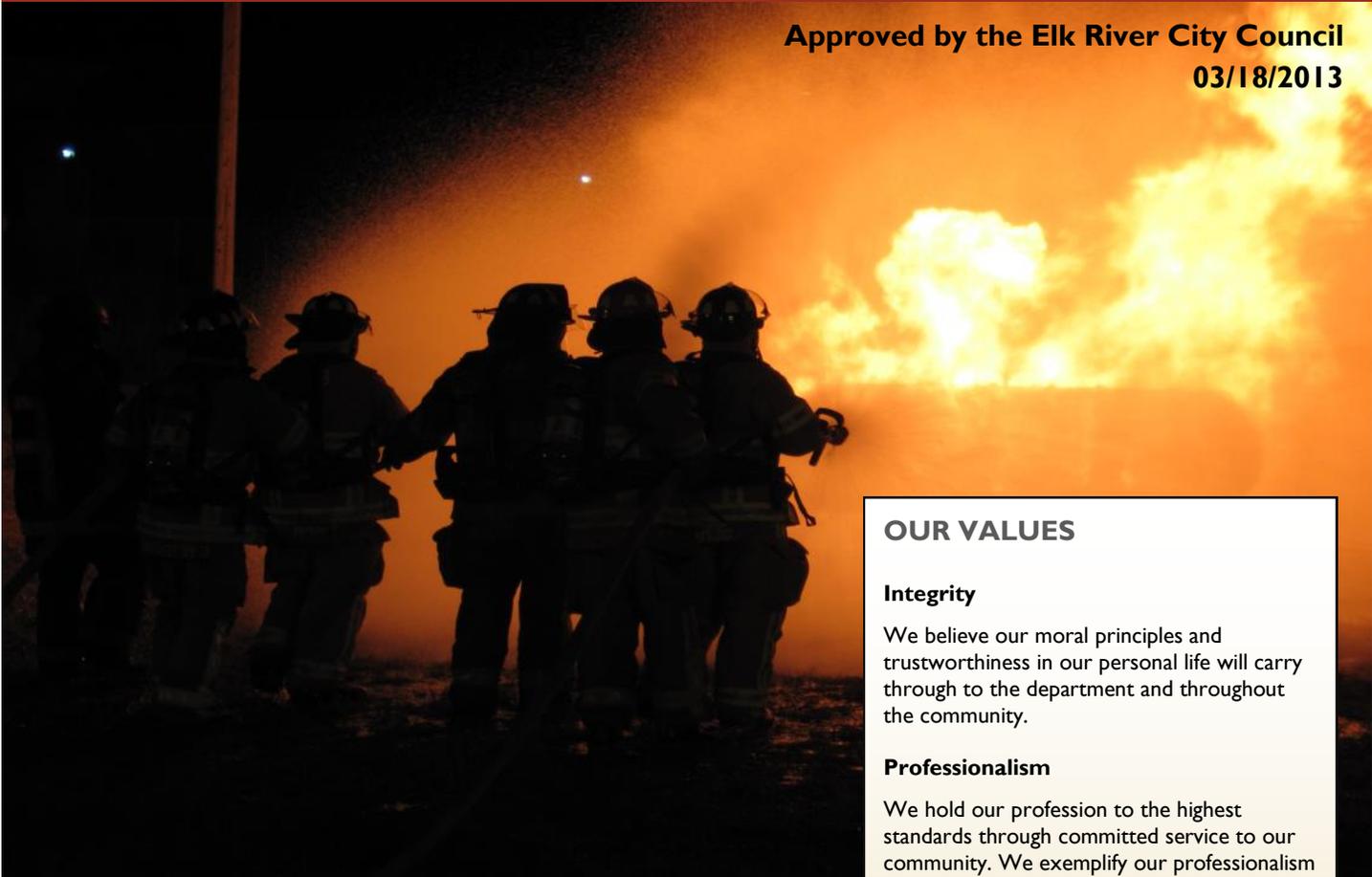


# Elk River Fire Department

Strategic Plan  
2013-2017



Approved by the Elk River City Council  
03/18/2013



## Our Mission

As the Elk River Fire Department, our care and concern for our community defines our mission to preserve the lives and property of all residents, proprietors and visitors within our service area through strong leadership and professional staff using state of the art equipment.

## OUR VALUES

### Integrity

We believe our moral principles and trustworthiness in our personal life will carry through to the department and throughout the community.

### Professionalism

We hold our profession to the highest standards through committed service to our community. We exemplify our professionalism in the way we conduct ourselves through training and service.

### Honor

We salute those past and present who have served and serve. We honor the traditions of the fire service through our commitment, self-sacrifice and pride in our department and community.

### Compassion

We treat everyone in a nonjudgmental, supportive, and caring manner.

### Dedication

We respond to all tasks in a faithful and selfless manner.



# ELK RIVER FIRE DEPARTMENT

## STRATEGIC PLAN

2013-2017

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## MAYOR'S MESSAGE

December 2012

It has been an honor and a privilege to be part of the Elk River Fire Service Task Force. I have always been very interested in our Fire Department and certainly have appreciated all that the department has done and continues to do for the citizens of Elk River.

A lot of thought and effort have gone into the Elk River Fire Department's 2013-2017 Strategic Plan. Our committee has involved firefighters, public officials and city staff. Our meetings have been open to the public and several firefighters have been in the audience at each meeting. We are very thankful for the input of committee member Jerry Streich, Fire Chief for the Centennial District. His knowledge and perspective was a tremendous asset for our committee.



Change for change sake accomplishes nothing, but change is good when it is the result of taking a good look at yourself and finding ways to improve. I know that sometimes change is difficult to accept but without change, an organization becomes stagnant. The Elk River Fire Department is certainly not broke, but that doesn't mean that changes can't make things better. I ask that everyone who is affected by this Strategic Plan give it a fair chance to work. Plenty of research went into this report and decisions were well thought out.

The Elk River Fire Department is a vital city department. Along with the Police Department and the Street Department, they combine to give our citizens excellent service in the area of Public Safety.

This Strategic Plan is not written in stone. It is a guide to follow, to give our Fire Department direction going into the future. It sets a clear path that has goals for us to try and attain.

I thank all members of the Elk River Fire Service Task Force for their dedication in this year-long endeavor. I think we achieved a result we can all be proud of, one that will allow our Fire Department to expand and flourish over the next five years.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John J. Dietz". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

John J. Dietz, Mayor  
City of Elk River

## CHIEF'S MESSAGE

December 2012

On behalf of the City of Elk River, Fire Service Task Force, I am extremely pleased to present the Elk River Fire Department's 2013-2017 Strategic Plan. This plan is the culmination of many months of hard work. The Fire Service Task Force, composed of elected officials, city staff, department leadership and firefighters, brings forth a compressive plan that will serve as a guide for the future.



Throughout history, America's fire service has been constantly evolving to meet the growing needs of the communities in which they service. As we look to the future, we recognize that, as an organization, we must proactively respond to change by collaborating on new ideas, identifying areas for improvement and developing viable solutions for the problems of today and in the years to come.

This plan is designed to provide decision makers at all levels – within the department and beyond – with a living, breathing five year planning document for the basis of making strategic, long-range decisions. The plan provides us with clear direction, priorities, and a focus on continuing to provide excellent service to our community.

As an organization, we stand committed to accepting the challenge of cultivating these strategic initiatives into reality. Over the course of these next five years, fire department staff will strive to accomplish the objectives that support each of the goals and initiatives as outlined in this plan.

We will continue to monitor progress and will communicate our success to our stakeholders.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "T. John C." in a cursive style.

T. John Cunningham, Fire Chief  
City of Elk River

## FIRE SERVICE TASK FORCE

On Monday, February 6, 2012, the Elk River City Council formed the Fire Service Task Force (Task Force). The primary goal of the Task Force was to develop a strategic plan for the Elk River Fire Department and to lay the foundation for meeting the service needs of the community with respect to fire/rescue capabilities and code enforcement/fire prevention.

This action marked the beginning of a journey to create, what is now, a five-year strategic planning document. Over the course of a year, the Task Force met to discuss the past, present and future fire department. Unlike many strategic planning initiatives, this project was coordinated, facilitated and completed by members of the Task Force. While it is not uncommon for agencies to hire outside consultants, the Task Force implemented a best practices approach to leading discussions, evaluating the department's current capabilities and drafting initiatives for the future. In the end, this approach saved considerable tax dollars while yielding actionable results.

### The Team

The City Council approved the creation of a 10-member Task Force, representative of elected officials, city administration, fire department employees and outside agencies.

Phil Collins, District Chief	Dave King, Firefighter
T. John Cunningham, Fire Chief	Joseph Libor, Firefighter
Chris Curtis, Captain	Ron Nierenhausen, Police Captain
John J. Dietz, Mayor	Timothy Simon, Finance Director
Jerry Gumphrey, Councilmember	Jerry Streich, Outside Fire Chief

The city administrator, Calvin Portner, and human resources representative, Lauren Wipper, served as ad-hoc members of the Task Force.

### Planning Methodology

In order for any business or organization to be successful, it must have a plan. The organization that has a clear direction, is aware of its environment and demographics, and has a map as a guide to reach its destination, will have the best chance of meeting the needs of its stakeholders and customers.

As a public entity, we are charged with carrying out the mission of the organization in a fiscally responsible manner. In times of greater economic uncertainty, it is more imperative than ever that personnel and resources are allocated where they have the greatest impact and that government operations are as efficient, streamlined and cost effective as possible - all the while maintaining the level of service that the community expects. In many respects, the "new normal" is constantly changing and evolving.

## FIRE SERVICE TASK FORCE

The City of Elk River has a superb reputation for long-term planning, as represented in its comprehensive plan, strong financial and capital improvement forecasting and business recruitment efforts.

This plan represents the **first** comprehensive strategic plan for the fire department. With this in mind, the Task Force set out to identify short-term initiatives (within 5 years) and goals/objectives that were actionable and measurable. As such, there was a greater emphasis on completing an internal evaluation by comparing current operations to that of industry standards, peer departments and best practices. The priority of the Task Force was ensuring that the department – through its leadership, personnel and actions – are meeting the needs of its stakeholders and customers.

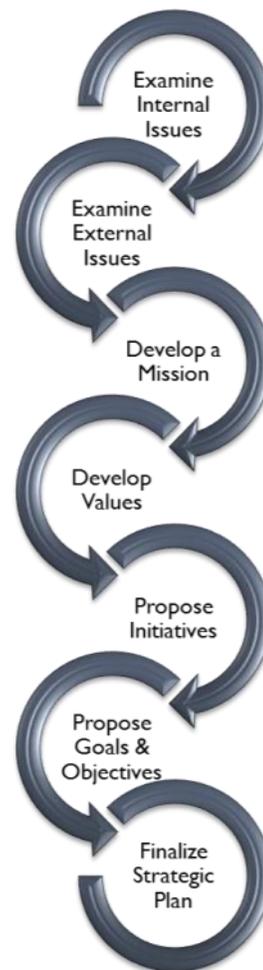
The diagram to the right represents the process the Task Force took in evaluating internal/external issues that ultimately led to the creation of this plan.

### Honoring Tradition and Planning for Change

Elk River, both as a city and its fire department, is rich with history. The Task Force recognizes the efforts of those that have built the fire department to what it is today, including the many firefighters that have decades of experience and are still proudly serving their community.

The city, and the fire department's entire service district, has grown considerably since the fire department was formed over 130 years ago. The population of Elk River, for instance, has grown over 44% in just the past decade. From humble beginnings as a river town on the ox cart trail, Elk River has grown into a regional center with high tech manufacturing and a lifecycle residential housing serving residents who take advantage of their proximity to the twin cities and the St. Cloud area. As a city grows, so does the demand for service.

While we recognize the history and traditions of the past, we realize that we must plan and adapt for the future. The Task Force challenged itself to conduct a candid assessment of the organization's strengths and weaknesses and identified opportunities and challenges. The result was a plan that refreshes the organization's commitment to excellence by laying the foundation for future success.



## DEPARTMENT PROFILE

Operational since 1881, the Elk River Fire Department provides all-hazard emergency and non-emergency services to the City of Elk River and its contractual partners of Otsego and Big Lake Township. The fire department serves a population of approximately 35,000 residents within its 66-square mile coverage area. The department provides a wide range of services to the community, which includes:

- Fire suppression
- Technical rescue
- Hazardous materials response
- Building, fire and life safety inspections
- Community code enforcement
- Education and fire prevention
- Emergency management and disaster response

The fire department is directed by a full-time fire chief who also serves as the city's emergency management director and safety coordinator. A part-time office assistant is tasked with handling data entry of fire reports and assisting the fire chief on administrative matters.

### Emergency Response Operations

The department responds to approximately 450 calls for service annually, ranging from structure fires, to car accidents, to fire alarms. Emergency responses are handled by a 40-member on-call fire department. The fire department responds out of two fire stations and has a diverse fleet consisting of 3 engines, 1 ladder, 1 heavy rescue, 2 tenders, 4 grass trucks and various support vehicles.

The fire district, at the time of this publication, has an Insurance Services Organization (ISO) classification of 3/9, and is currently being reevaluated.

Over the years, the city has transitioned from an entirely volunteer contingent of firefighters to a paid on-call model. Department staffing levels and structure, with the exception of hiring a full-time fire chief in 1994, has remained largely unchanged over the past few decades. Today, firefighters are paid for actual hours worked, including training, event standbys and other formal duties.

Through the Elk River Fire Department Relief Association, every on-call firefighter also earns a pension of \$5,091/year as of 2012, which is paid in-full after 20 years of active service.

While the fire department does not respond to medical calls, roughly 50% of firefighters are certified Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) and are responders on the ambulance service, a separate 501(c)4 non-profit agency.

## DEPARTMENT PROFILE

### Fire & Building Safety

In 2012, the city underwent a number of organizational changes. Coinciding with the city's new organizational structure, two existing city services – the Building Safety and Code Enforcement divisions – were moved under the auspices of the fire department and report to the fire chief.

The Fire and Building Safety Division, under the direction of the building official, oversees all building, fire and rental inspections – including the office of the fire marshal, which had previously reported directly to the fire chief. Consisting of six-full time and one part-time employee, the Fire and Building Safety Division staff review and approve construction plans and complete on-site inspections during the construction process to ensure compliance with applicable building and fire safety codes. The division is committed to minimizing the risk of danger through fire and building safety code compliance, planning and inspections. With the number of rental properties increasing across the city, staff, through the rental housing inspection program, work to protect the interests of both property owners and renters.

### Fire Prevention

The fire department believes that the best fire is the one that is prevented. Throughout the year, the department's Fire Prevention Division, with a full-time prevention specialist, works to educate the community on fire safety. The division identifies and coordinates classroom fire prevention training and educates various target populations on prevention and workplace/home safety.

### Code Enforcement

Code enforcement seeks to enforce exterior maintenance and ordinance requirements throughout the city. This includes enforcing rules pertaining to property maintenance, setback requirements, commercial signage and various nuisance standards.

While code enforcement primarily maintains quality of life standards, they also play an important role in the early identification of unsafe entry points, exterior hazards, public health hazard mitigation and ensuring compliance with humane pet standards.

This division works closely with the city's planning and economic development divisions to help attract and retain businesses. The department employs one code enforcement official.

## COMMUNITY PROFILE

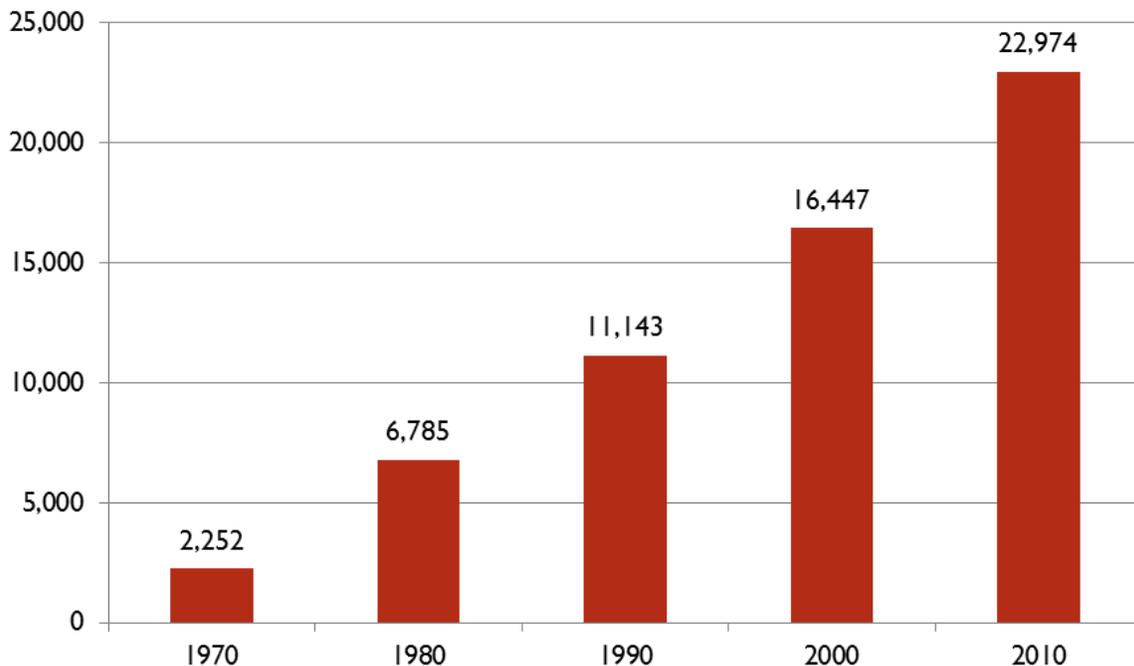
Located approximately 40 miles northwest of Minneapolis/St. Paul, Elk River is one of the largest land-mass cities in Minnesota. The city's official brand, *Powered by Nature*, was crafted in 2011 and contains the following brand promise, which is reflected in the actions of city government and the services provided to the community:

*"For people who want to breathe the outdoors, yet want access to big city amenities, Elk River is an emerging small city where the Elk and Mississippi Rivers flow together on the fringe of the Twin Cities and where the heart is powered by its nature so you are energized and inspired to make a difference."*

### Population

Elk River's population has grown significantly over the past 40 years. The population grew from 2,252 in 1970 to 22,974 in 2010, an increase of 920%. A Comprehensive Housing Needs Analysis that was completed in 2012 for the city revealed the following:

- The City of Elk River is forecast to add an additional 3,290 people and 1,280 households between 2010 and 2020.
- In total, Elk River is reported to have approximately 8,540 housing units, of which about 6,480 are owner occupied and 1,600 are renter occupied.
- The population in Elk River is aging and older age cohorts are accounting for a significant percentage of the population.
- Elk River has eight senior housing facilities with a total of 353 units.



## COMMUNITY PROFILE

### Business and Industry

Elk River’s location has made it an ideal destination for business and industry. Situated close to the metro and along two major highways, Elk River is home to a wide range of original equipment manufacturers (OEM), light and heavy industrial manufacturing facilities and multiple data centers. The proliferation of commercial and industrial development creates unique opportunities and challenges for emergency service providers as tactics, strategies, equipment and personnel needs commonly reflect that of the specific target hazards of a community.

### Government

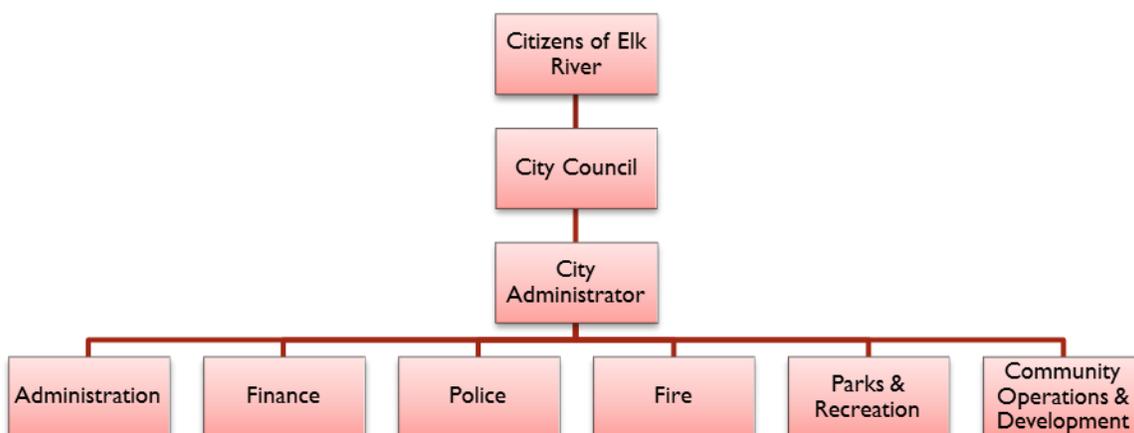
Elk River is a Statutory Plan A city with a weak Mayor-Council form of government whereby administrative, as well as legislative, authority is the ultimate responsibility of the City Council.

The Mayor and four Councilmembers serve on the City Council as elected officials for 4-year terms. The Mayor is elected by the electors of the city at large. The city is divided into four wards, with a Councilmember representing each ward.

### City Administration

The city administrator is responsible for the ongoing operations of the city, city council relations, strategic planning, policy research and implementation, oversight of boards and commissions, performance management and general city administration.

City operations are divided into six functional areas, five are official departments, led by department directors.



## FINANCIAL PICTURE

Evaluating fiscal trends are important in making long-term strategic planning decisions. While it is often difficult to predict future economic conditions, it is nonetheless important that the city, and the fire department, make informed and sound decisions today that may impact the future. The following information provides a brief overview of the fire department’s operating budget.

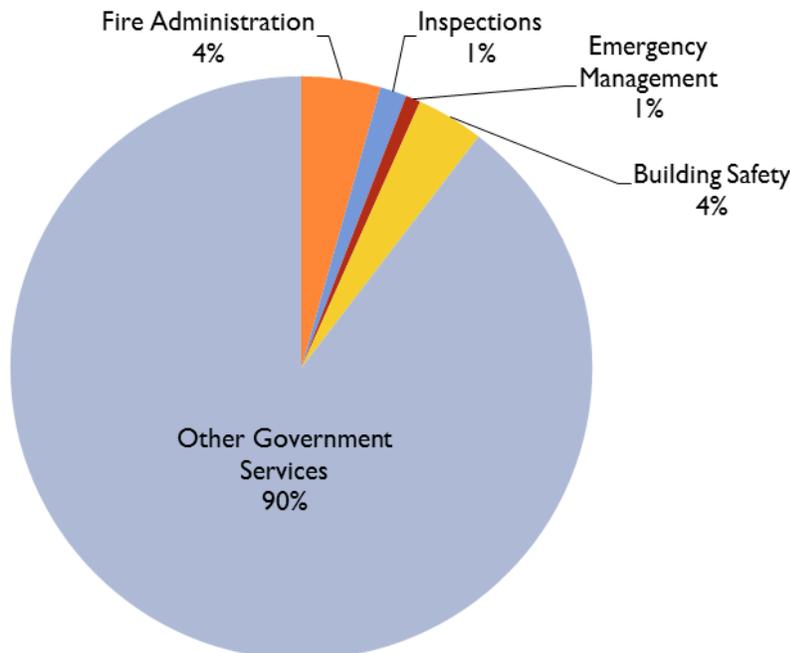
### Historical Budget Information

	2012	2011	2010	2009
Fire Administration	\$555,500	\$589,600	\$465,550	\$460,600
Inspections	\$188,000	\$184,850	\$186,400	\$184,600
Emergency Management	\$103,900	\$107,400	\$30,800	\$48,300
Building Safety*	\$473,350	\$465,200	\$465,550	\$651,450
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$1,320,750</b>	<b>\$1,347,050</b>	<b>\$1,148,300</b>	<b>\$1,344,900</b>

\* In third quarter 2012, the building safety division moved to the fire department.

In 2012, the city’s general operating budget was \$12,678,050. The fire department, including all of its divisions, accounted for approximately 10% of the overall budget, as represented in the chart below.

### Percentage of General Fund Budget by Division



## FINANCIAL PICTURE

### Capital Projects

The fire department’s long-term capital projects, including vehicle replacements, are included as part of the city’s overall Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). Projects are reviewed on an annual basis. The next significant forecasted CIP purchase is the replacement of the department’s aerial ladder in 2014, which is estimated to cost upwards of \$1 million. A copy of the city’s CIP is available online at [www.ElkRiverMN.gov](http://www.ElkRiverMN.gov).

### Revenue

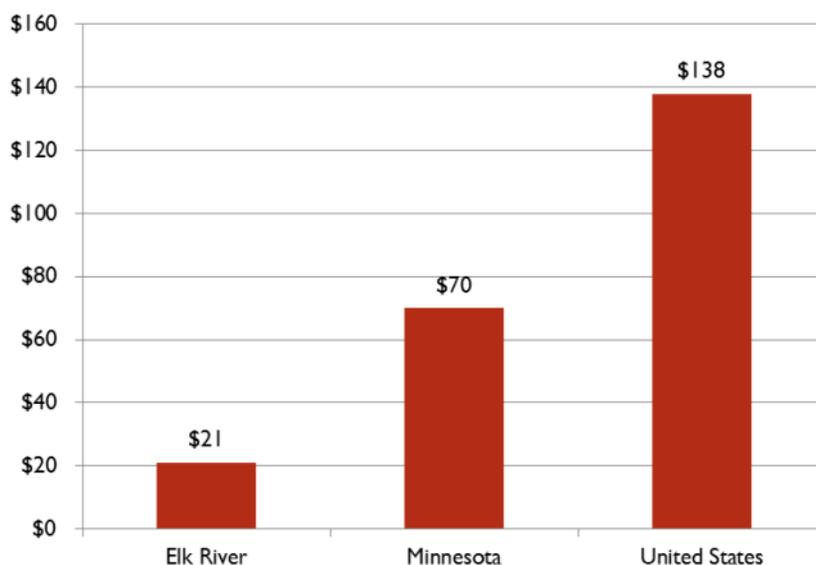
Through contractual agreements with the City of Otsego and Big Lake Township, the fire department provides fire, rescue and other emergency response services to our neighboring jurisdictions. These agreements generate approximately \$200,000 in revenue for the city, which is about 1/3 the operating budget for fire administration/operations.

Through building and other permits, the Fire and Building Safety Division is forecasting revenue of \$495,000 in 2013.

### State and National Comparisons

According to a 2010 study by the Minnesota Taxpayers Association, fire protection is approximately \$70.28 per capita in Minnesota compared to the national U.S. average of \$137.83. On a local level, the per capita cost in for Elk River is roughly \$21 (district wide), as represented in the chart below (excluding emergency management and building safety). This is 70% below the state and 85% below the national per capita average.

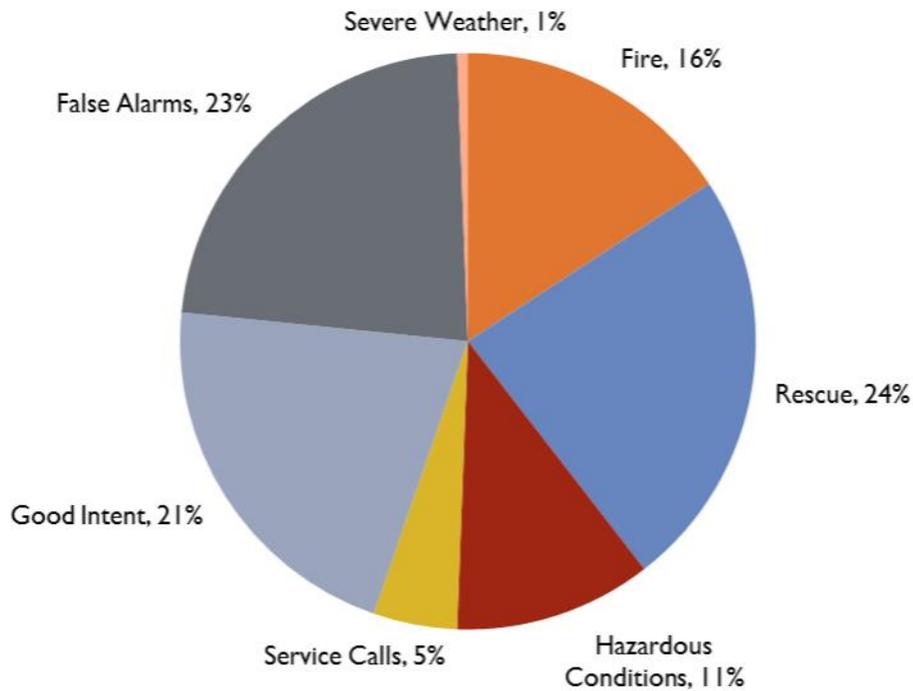
**Fire Protection per Capita Comparisons**



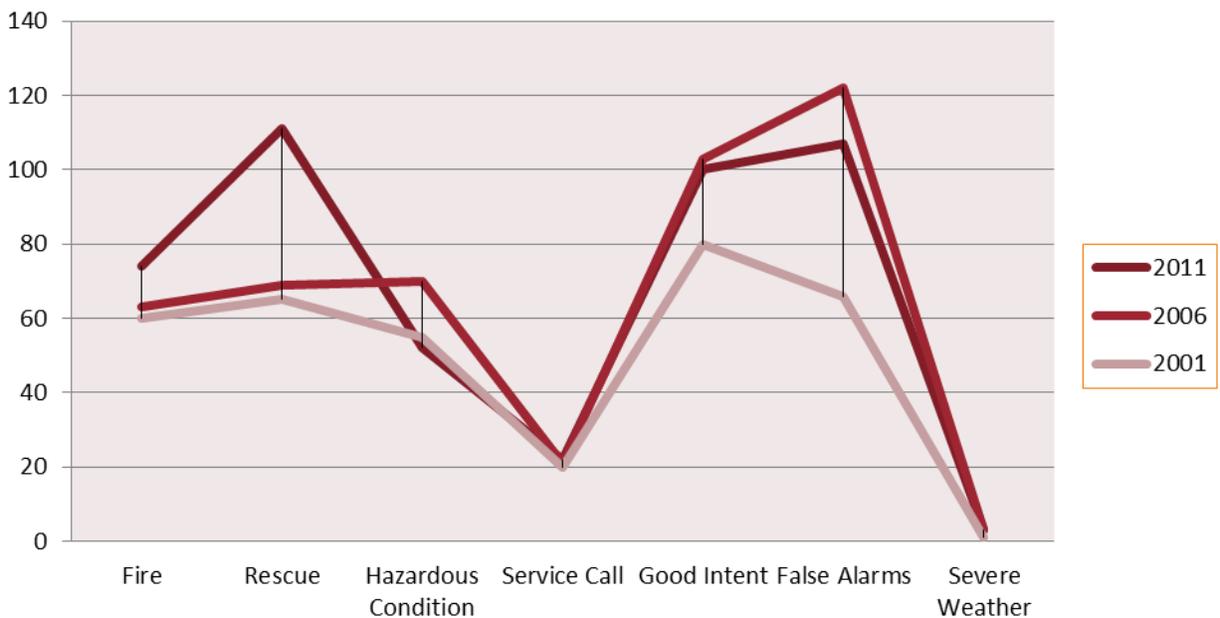
## INCIDENT STATISTICS

Between 2001 and 2011, the department has experienced a 35% increase in call volume. Today, the department averages approximately 400-469 calls for service each year. In 2011, the fire department responded to 469 calls for service.

### 2011 Incident Type Summary



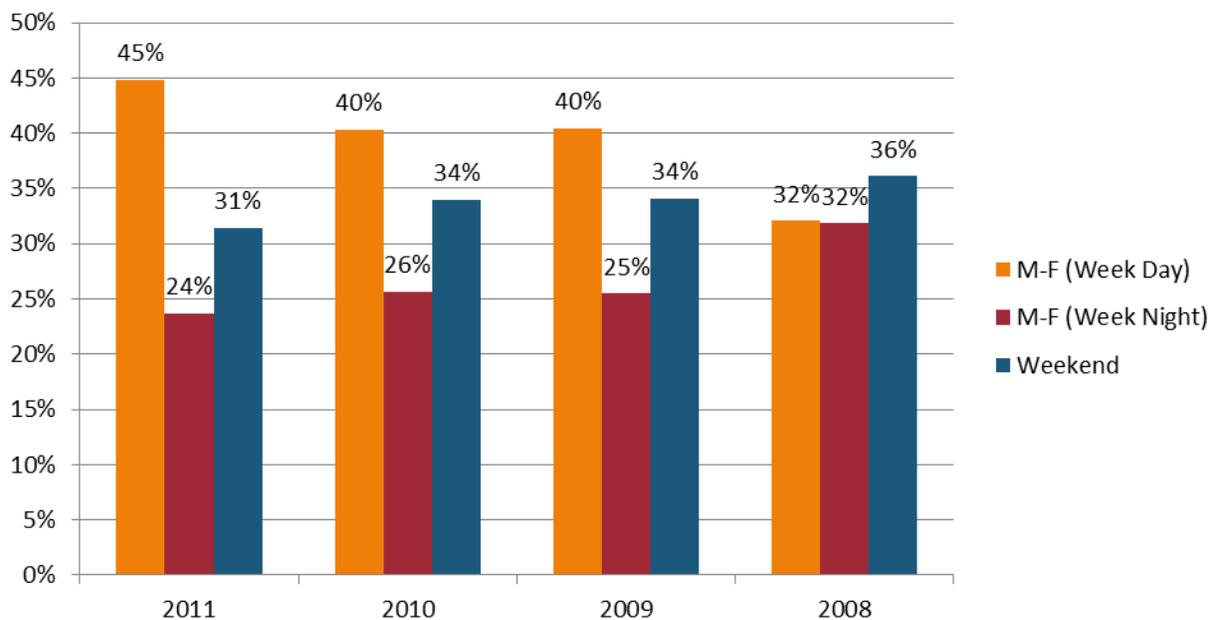
### 10 Year Change Summary



## INCIDENT STATISTICS

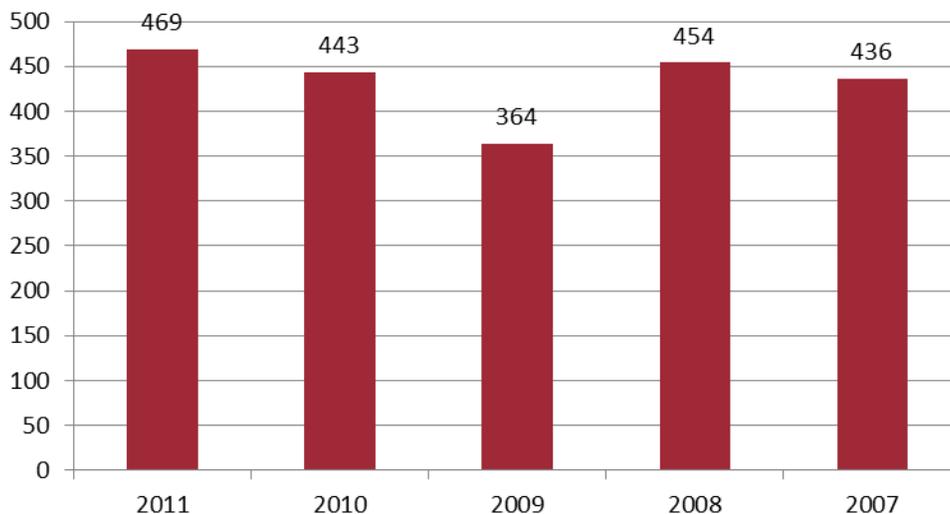
Historically, data suggests that many of the department's calls occur at night and on weekends. A review of data since 2008 suggests a fairly significant shift in when calls are occurring. Between 2008-2011, daytime calls have increased by 13%, as shown in the chart below.

Incidents by Day of Week



As an on-call fire department, the majority of firefighters have other regular, full-time jobs, mostly during regular business hours. The increase of daytime calls can potentially impact responses and fire/rescue operations if there is a lack of availability of day-time on-call firefighters.

5 Year Call Volume Summary





## HAZARD ANALYSIS

In 2012, Sherburne County commissioned the development of a Hazard Mitigation Plan. The plan, which is provided to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), is a comprehensive study of the community's risks/vulnerabilities and contains measures that communities plan on take to help prepare for, responds to, and recover from a disaster or large scale incident.

Elk River is a key stakeholder in the plan, in large part due to the city's population, geographical location and the numerous risks/vulnerabilities located within the city limits. The following vulnerabilities were identified countywide, which have the potential to impact, directly or indirectly, the City of Elk River:

- Tornados
- Critical facility and infrastructure loss
- Hazardous materials release
- Power failures
- Nuclear power plant incidents
- Infectious disease outbreak
- Severe thunderstorms
- Drought
- Flooding
- Wildfires
- Landfill infrastructure leakage
- Lightning
- Dam failure
- Extreme temperatures
- Aircraft incidents
- Invasive species



As first responders, the city's fire and police departments are committed and prepared respond to any natural disaster, accident or emergency situation. Many of the city's risks and vulnerabilities have a high likelihood of occurrence and have minimal warning time to the public, such as the case of severe weather.

Based on the risk and vulnerability assessments, the county and local jurisdictions collaborated to develop and incorporate mitigation strategies into the final Hazard Mitigation Plan. As an all-hazard plan, many of the mitigation strategies will minimize the impact of any emergency.

Since emergency management duties fall under the auspices of the fire department, many of the initiatives identified in fire department's Strategic Plan relate to the strategies that were submitted as part of the Hazard Mitigation Plan.

## HAZARD ANALYSIS



An important component of the Hazard Mitigation Plan are the strategies that local and county jurisdictions plan to implement to strengthen its ability to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters. Below is a summary of the goals and objectives that Elk River has identified, through the hazard mitigation planning process, as being important. Since this plan is a countywide initiative, there are some goals and objectives that are shared with other stakeholders, such as the

county and other jurisdictions. In some instances, Elk River may be the overall coordinating party or it may be shared with another jurisdiction.

### **Goal 1: Enhance public communications during a disaster/emergency.**

- Enhance public outdoor emergency notifications at key facilities throughout Elk River, including school/athletic complexes.
- Deploy a more robust citizen notification system integrated with next-gen technology in Elk River (shared initiative with Sherburne County).
- Improve multi-agency response to all emergencies and disasters (countywide initiative).

### **Goal 2: Prepare and train first responders and emergency management personnel for all hazards.**

- Improve multi-agency responses to all emergencies and disasters (countywide initiative).
- Develop and implement a more standardized and comprehensive fire training program (Elk River initiative).

### **Goal 3: Improve the capability of the residents to identify, prepare for, and respond to hazards.**

- Conduct public education campaigns to raise community awareness about disasters (countywide initiative).
- Create local emergency planning material for the City of Elk River, including print/video/web media.

### **Goal 4: Assess needs for jurisdiction Emergency Operations Centers (EOC) and implement changes as needed.**

- Upgrade technology capabilities in jurisdiction EOCs (countywide initiative).

## HAZARD ANALYSIS

### Goal 5: Maintain a robust emergency response program.

- Review and update emergency response plans (countywide initiative)
- Create a county resource inventory (countywide initiative)

### Goal 6: Enhance incident management and command/control

- Deploy countywide-incident command and accountability system (countywide initiative, with Elk River as the lead agency).

### Goal 7: Enhance public safety training

- Build a state-of-the-art public safety training complex (Elk River initiative).

### Goal 8: Enhance rural water supply operations and improve ISO rating.

- Install rural cisterns and large capacity water holding tanks (Elk River initiative).

### Goal 9: To reduce the loss of life and property in the event of a terrorist attack.

- Ensure first responders are properly prepared to respond to a terrorist attack (countywide initiative).

### Goal 10: Minimize the impact of hazardous materials incidents.

- Conduct hazardous materials training and exercises (countywide initiative).

### Goal 11: Reduce risk to critical government facilities and infrastructure.

- Improve security measures for critical infrastructure (countywide initiative).

### Goal 12: Install remote security cameras at key public locations.

- Enhance security at key public locations through digital remote video monitoring (Elk River initiative).





## MISSION STATEMENT

Over the centuries, the fire service has transitioned from bucket brigades to horse-drawn carriages to modern-era, high-tech firefighting equipment. While firefighting is still an essential function of most cities, the expectations of the fire service has demanded growth into a full-service, all-hazards emergency services business. Regardless of when or why 911 is called, the fire service must be prepared to respond.

Having a clear missions is important to any organization. To craft the organization's first formal mission statement, the Fire Service Task Force held a 6-hour strategic planning session on October 17, 2012.

The result was the creation of the Elk River Fire Department's mission statement:

***As the Elk River Fire Department, our care and concern for our community defines our mission to preserve the lives and property of all residents, proprietors and visitors within our service area through strong leadership and professional staff using state of the art equipment.***

The mission statement is designed to answer the following questions about the organization:

- Who are we?
- Why do we exist?
- What do we do?
- Why do we do it?



Photo courtesy of c. Michael Studio

## CORE VALUES

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As public servants, values define us as an organization and as individuals. We are measured by our spoken words and our actions. We are accountable to ourselves, our team, our community, our nation and our family.

The fire service is rich with history and tradition. The badge firefighters wear is not a right but an honor - a symbol of the commitment each member is willing to make to carry out their duties and responsibilities. The men and women of the fire service are united by a common mission to save lives, protect property and to preserve the environment.

As an organization, the Elk River Fire Department has a core set of values that carry through to each member. As a philosophy, we believe that we are not just employees, but members of an exceptional team. To be exceptional, we strive to support and take care of each other. This is the brotherhood of our profession.

Each member of the Elk River Fire Department has the responsibility to leave this department better than he/she found it. To that end, our core values are:

### **Integrity**

We believe our moral principles and trustworthiness in our personal life will carry through to the department and throughout the community.

### **Professionalism**

We hold our profession to the highest standards through committed service to our community. We exemplify our professionalism in the way we conduct ourselves through training and service.

### **Honor**

We salute those past and present who have served and serve. We honor the traditions of the fire service through our commitment, self-sacrifice and pride in our department and community.

### **Compassion**

We treat everyone in a nonjudgmental, supportive, and caring manner.

### **Dedication**

We respond to all tasks in a faithful and selfless manner.

## NEW ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The cornerstone of a first-class fire department is a strong leadership and organizational structure. Trained and prepared for often the most difficult and dangerous tasks, whether it be the result of a man-made or natural occurrence, firefighters are called to perform under the most adverse conditions. Professionalism, teamwork, personal discipline, dedication and loyalty are the personal characteristics that form the cultural foundation of the fire service.

As a safety-oriented organization, we have adopted a paramilitary style organizational structure. Evidence of this is seen in the use of the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and the utilization of the Incident Command System (ICS) at emergency events. This type of structure provides for strategic and tactical level direction, ensures accountability and maintains an appropriate span-of-control.

### We are in the customer service business!

While the ICS is considered the backbone of any incident response, a strong organizational structure is also important for day-to-day operations. In years past, the fire service often had a limited mission, which was to suppress fires. Today, we are a full-service emergency and non-emergency customer service organization that cares about the *overall* safety and well being of our community.

The modern era fire service focuses on four specific service areas: mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery. This is reflected in the Elk River Fire Department's new mission statement.



### Planning for the Future

As responsibility and demand increase, it is important that this department reviews its organizational structure to ensure that it appropriately meets the expectations of its stakeholders.

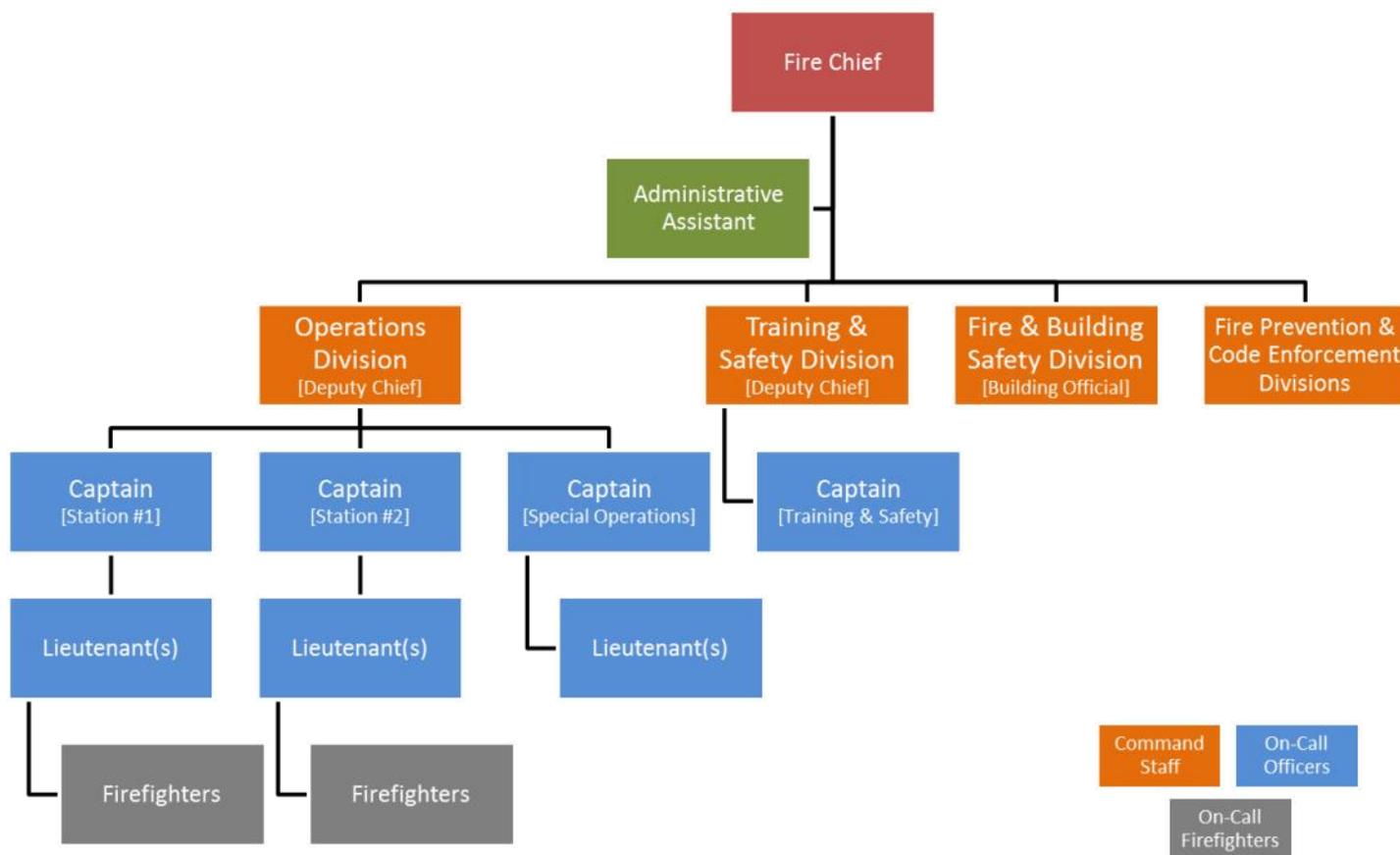
The Fire Service Task Force spent considerable time reviewing the current organizational structure of the department, taking into consideration the recent merger of the building safety and code enforcement divisions. This review included looking at organizational structures of other departments (both large and small) and functional areas of responsibility outlined in job descriptions from other cities.

## NEW ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Based on this research, the Fire Service Task Force has recommended a new organizational structure, which includes the creation of two major functional areas, both of which will be overseen by a full-time deputy fire chief. The *Operations Division* will oversee day-to-day emergency response operations, including the direct supervision of the department’s on-call leadership staff. The second is a *Training and Safety Division*, which will direct the fire department’s training program, including the creation of an internal fire academy for new recruits, and will also coordinate the city’s overall safety program.

These changes provide for a more manageable span-of-control, greater accountability, clear next-in-line authority, expansion flexibility and long-term succession planning. The creation of two deputy chief positions will also enhance the city’s emergency management capabilities and, by enhancing the department’s training program, provide future revenue generating opportunities.

The following is the department’s new organizational structure as recommended by the Fire Service Task Force, which is supported by the fire chief. Implementation methodologies are discussed later in the plan.



## STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Central to any strategic planning process is the evaluation of an organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges/threats. This is commonly referred to as a S.W.O.T. or S.W.O.C. analysis. The Task Force was committed to an open and transparent process in which any stakeholder was welcome to attend meetings and to share their ideas, concerns and thoughts for the future.



The Task Force was composed of diverse contributors representing public safety, management, fire department personnel, the public through elected officials and an experienced metro-area fire chief. This blending of talent provided for invigorating discussion on wide-ranging topics for the future of the Elk River Fire Department.

On May 16, 2012, a meeting was held with the entire Elk River Fire Department with the purpose of involving firefighters at all levels with the process and to ensure that their ideas are brought forward.

### Initiatives for the Future

Taking into consideration months of discussion and input from key stakeholders, including members of the fire department, the Fire Service Task Force has drafted 10 strategic initiatives. These initiatives, along with specific goals and objectives, will be the foundation for the future.

***“Desire is the key to motivation, but it’s determination and commitment to an unrelenting pursuit of your goal — a commitment to excellence — that will enable you to attain the success you seek.”***

—Mario Andretti

## THE ELK RIVER VISION

In 2010, city leadership began an extensive visioning process with the purpose of identifying key initiatives and goals to help direct future actions on a department and citywide level. The City Council adopted the following vision statement and strategic goals:

### Vision

*Abounding in natural beauty, Elk River is a vibrant, historic rivertown that promotes an active lifestyle in an innovative and involved community offering unlimited opportunities.*

### Goals and Action Steps

**Innovation: Develop new programs and services to meet the needs of the community.**

- A. Evaluate existing programs and services
- B. Enhance communication
- C. Explore and develop new programs and services

**Community Development: Enhance and Expand community involvement and public participation through a variety of innovative outlets**

- A. Enhance and expand communication
- B. Enhance and expand and diversify public education and outreach
- C. Create the Elk River brand
- D. Increase volunteerism

**Beautification: Have attractive, welcoming streetscapes at City entrances and primary corridors. Enforce zoning ordinances.**

- A. Improve, revitalize, and invest in streetscaping along primary corridors and entrances
- B. Provide consistent and expanded signage
- C. Create opportunities to beautify community

**Opportunities: Foster a pro-business atmosphere that provides incentives and other opportunities for new and existing business growth**

- A. Position land for development
- B. Facilitate development and redevelopment
- C. Evaluate existing programs and services

In 2012, a fifth goal, strategic planning, was added. As a city department, the Elk River Fire Department is committed to helping the city reach its potential with respect to its vision and goals, as is reflected in the development of this plan.

## INITIATIVE #1

## 1

## Organizational Structure & Career Development

### Supports the City's Visionary Goal:

*Innovation*

### Specific Action Step:

*Evaluate existing programs and services*

The Elk River Fire Department organization is composed of a balanced, hierarchical structure that provides leadership, mentorship and accountability for a living organization that is flexible to meet changing needs, foresighted to prepare new leaders for the future and sustaining to maintain accountability to the organization and the community.



## GOAL IA

Improve administrative and operational efficiency, accountability and oversight.

### Objectives

1. Develop a new organizational structure that maintains an appropriate span of control and provides for efficiency, accountability and a clear chain of command.
2. Hire a full-time deputy chief of operations and a deputy chief of training and safety.
3. Evaluate current and future administrative workloads and processes.
4. Expand leadership opportunities at all levels of the organization.
5. Develop job descriptions for all positions.
6. Refine/review a process for selecting and/or appointing officers.
7. Review and benchmark the department's compensation plan for on-call firefighters and officers.

## GOAL IB

Develop Elk River Fire Department personnel to their fullest professional potential.

### Objectives

1. Continue to develop an organizational culture that recognizes our people are our greatest asset.
2. Develop career planning, employee development and succession planning programs for all employees.
3. Develop a new employee orientation/mentoring program and explore opportunities to retain firefighters.
4. Finalize an awards and recognition program to recognize members for their accomplishments and achievements.
5. Develop an organizational environment that promotes member commitment, loyalty, respect, and cooperation.

## INITIATIVE #2

## 2

The department will have sufficient emergency response staffing levels to ensure protection levels that meet community expectations, affirmed firefighter safety and wellbeing and appropriate training opportunities for all emergency response needs.

## Emergency Response Staffing and Operations

**Supports the City's Visionary Goal:**

*Innovation*

**Specific Action Step:**

*Evaluate existing programs and services*



# EMERGENCY RESPONSE STAFFING AND OPERATIONS

## GOAL 2A

Provide appropriate and efficient staffing for emergency responses.

### Objectives

1. Increase current on-call firefighter staffing by hiring, within 3 years, an additional 15 on-call firefighters.
2. Maintain an adequate level of staffing and supervision throughout the organization, including all individual fire station locations.
3. Plan for long-term emergency response staffing needs.

## GOAL 2B

Evaluate equipment needs and the distribution of resources across entire service district.

### Objectives

1. Review and update long-term Capital Improvement Plan (CIP).
2. Develop a long-term station and resource distribution plan within the City of Elk River.
3. Collaborate with neighboring cities and jurisdictions on future service needs, including stations, personnel and equipment.

## GOAL 2C

Determine extent to which the department will provide additional specialty capabilities.

### Objectives

1. Identify unique target hazards within jurisdiction and prepare appropriate levels of response.

## INITIATIVE #3

## 3

## Policy Development and Decision Making

**Supports the City's Visionary Goal:**

*Innovation*

**Specific Action Step:**

*Evaluate existing programs and services*

As a function of city government, the Elk River Fire Department will operate under the auspices of applicable local, state and federal law and within the scope of city and department policies, procedures and operational guidelines. Governing documents will be regularly updated to remain current with best practices, industry standards and laws. The department will work to ensure that policy development is done in a way to sustain and grow the organization.



### GOAL 3

Review and update applicable local ordinances, city/department policies and operational guidelines to reflect a modern-era fire department

#### Objectives

1. Update Chapter 22 of the Elk River Code of Ordinances.
2. Transition from by-laws to department policies, procedures and guidelines.
3. Develop a comprehensive policy, procedures and guidelines manual for the department.
4. Ensure that new policies, procedures and guidelines are communicated to everyone in the organization.
5. Evaluate all policies, procedures and guidelines annually.

## INITIATIVE #4

## 4

## Training

**Supports the City's Visionary Goal:***Opportunities***Specific Action Step:***Evaluate existing programs and services*

The Elk River Fire Department will provide oversight and management for the development, delivery, evaluation, and improvement of all training and educational programs. This will be done in a manner to ensure that the department is meeting local, state, and federal mandates as well as ensuring that the department operates in a safe, effective and efficient manner. The department is committed to training and developing future leaders.



### GOAL 4A

Develop a comprehensive in-house fire and emergency response training program.

#### Objectives

1. Define minimum KSAs (knowledge, skills and abilities), or performance standards, for all positions, including specialized teams.
2. Develop and maintain a comprehensive training program that is based on industry standards, best practices and meets applicable state and federal laws to ensure that firefighters maintain an acceptable level of performance.
3. Provide flexible and accessible training to encourage personal professional development and increase opportunities for meeting department standards.
4. Manage the increasing training requirements impacts on members time.
5. Design and implement task and company specific training programs (i.e. engine company operations, truck company operations, etc.)
6. Explore other options for delivering training (i.e. company/station training, online/blended learning, etc.).
7. Provide training on new department policies, procedures and guidelines.
8. Design and implement a driver education training program.
9. Design and implement a new firefighter training and orientation program.
10. Implement a training documentation system and process.
11. Conduct an evaluation on the department's annual medical and fitness screening.
12. Provide opportunities for outside training and professional career development.

### GOAL 4B

Develop current and future leaders.

#### Objectives

1. Provide management and leadership training for command staff.
2. Provide regular scenario based training for officers; research BlueCard command program.

### GOAL 4C

Become a leader in emergency services training.

#### Objectives

1. Design and implement a NFPA 1001 Firefighter I and II training program (Fire Academy).
2. Develop, market and provide training to the public and private sector.
3. Train, inspire and mentor Elk River instructors.
4. Create a business plan for building an emergency services training facility.

## INITIATIVE #5

## 5

**Communications****Supports the City's Visionary Goal:***Community Development***Specific Action Step:***Enhance and expand communication*

Communications, both internal and external, is important to the success of the organization. The Elk River Fire Department will communicate to our stakeholders utilizing all reasonable means available to ensure timely and appropriate dissemination of information to and from the organization. We will review all existing communication methodologies, mediums and policies to ensure that they are the most effective and appropriate. Internally, we want to communicate in a manner that will ensure cooperation and coordination at all levels of the organization while ensuring information is flowing up and down the chain of command.



## GOAL 5A

Improve internal communications

### Objectives

1. Perform a comprehensive review of the organization’s communication practices, processes and procedures; analyze effectiveness of different communication mediums (i.e. meeting vs. email, etc.)
2. Determine and implement best practices to communicate to the entire organization in the most efficient and effective manner.
3. Provide timely updates regarding implementation of the strategic plan.

## GOAL 5B

Improve external communications.

### Objectives

1. Perform a needs analysis for emergency and routine communications with the public as individuals, in groups, and mass communication scenarios.
2. Develop and implement a formal Public Information Officer (PIO) program.
3. Expand the organization’s web and social media footprint.

## INITIATIVE #6

## 6

## Performance Management

**Supports the City's Visionary Goal:***Innovation***Specific Action Step:***Evaluate existing programs and services*

Performance within the Elk River Fire Department will be managed in a manner that provides clear and recognized standards of performance and expectations throughout the department. Department and position standards will be reasonable and developed in a manner that is consistent with best practices, industry standards and in the best interest of the organization and our stakeholders to ensure the highest quality and effective services possible. Standards will be clearly communicated to all members of the department and enforced in a fair and consistent manner.



## PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

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### GOAL 6

Foster a culture that ensures accountability, follow-through and initiative within the entire department.

#### Objectives

1. City and department rules, regulations, policies and procedures will be applied consistently and fairly throughout the department.
2. Develop and implement annual performance evaluations at all levels of the department that provide mentorship, coaching and direction.

## INITIATIVE #7

## 7

## Revenue Enhancement

**Supports the City's Visionary Goal:***Opportunities***Specific Action Step:***Evaluate existing programs and services*

The Elk River Fire Department is committed to identifying and implementing available sources of revenue in order to fund operational and structural improvements, and to lessen the burden of its operations on the taxpayer. The department will seek to capture additional revenues through the expansion of contract services, enhanced reimbursable services and development of new value-added services for other public and private sector entities. In all these activities, the department will work closely with its jurisdictional partners and other stakeholders to ensure that the process is both fair and productive.



## REVENUE ENHANCEMENT

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### GOAL 7

Explore and establish alternative revenue sources to meet the current and future needs of the department.

#### Objectives

1. Explore and identify emergency response cost recovery opportunities.
2. Pursue grant funding opportunities within the private and public sector to enhance operations, training, public education and capital improvements.
3. Continue to explore and expand new contract services with neighboring jurisdictions, municipalities and private sector entities.
4. Explore and expand value-added service opportunities for residents and businesses.

## INITIATIVE #8

## 8

## Technology

**Supports the City's Visionary Goal:***Innovation***Specific Action Step:***Explore and develop new programs and services*

The Elk River Fire Department must continue to leverage technology in its plans for the future. As technology has become a fundamental component of the governmental landscape, the strategic application of technology must be balanced. As technology continues to evolve, it is important that the fire department partners with the IT Division to research, test and deploy state-of-the-art technology that will help keep our community and staff safe.



### GOAL 8

Enhance the department's use of technology in the delivery of services.

#### Objectives

1. Evaluate current IT infrastructure and hardware capabilities/requirements.
2. Evaluate current records management systems (Firehouse, PermitWorks, etc.) and explore/evaluate products that offer more robust and integrated solutions.
3. Provide first responders access to critical data in the field and allow for greater mobility/access to complete reports, inspections and other essential tasks.
4. Design and implement an internal portal to enhance the dissemination of information.
5. Provide a means for officers to complete electronic incident reports in the field and/or at stations.
6. Provide residents and businesses with greater access to department resources via the Internet.

## INITIATIVE #9

## 9

## Community Outreach and Education

**Supports the City's Visionary Goal:**

*Community Development*

**Specific Action Step:**

*Enhance, expand and diversify public education and outreach*

We exist to serve and protect our community. Keeping our community safe requires collaboration and cooperation at all levels and the community as a whole. As first responders, we are often the very first interaction that a resident or business owner has with local government, sometimes in the most difficult and stressful of situations. While we have a job to do, we want our interaction with our customers to be positive.



### GOAL 9A

Enhance our public education program.

#### Objectives

1. Evaluate and assess historical incident trends, inspection history and at-risk populations to ensure the department's educational and enforcement programs are reaching the right audience.
2. Define the education and training to be provided throughout the district and how to best provide these services.
3. Explore partnerships with community and educational organizations to enhance public education and outreach.
4. Explore the use of volunteers and the feasibility of creating a FireCorps program to assist with non-response tasks.
5. Enhance the use of online, print and other media to educate residents and businesses on fire prevention, code compliance, building permits and inspections.
6. Promote the Elk River Fire Department and our programs/services.

### GOAL 9B

Ensure our interaction with customers is a positive one.

#### Objectives

1. Develop and implement customer satisfaction surveys for all divisions within the department.
2. Develop and implement a post-incident support program to aid homeowners and businesses.
3. Utilize the Elk River Police Department's Chaplains whenever possible.

## INITIATIVE #10

## 10

## Emergency Management

**Supports the City's Visionary Goal:***Innovation***Specific Action Step:***Evaluate existing programs and services*

The Elk River Fire Department has adopted an all-hazards approach to emergency management and crisis response. This enables a community to be prepared for any variety of incidents and disasters. While infrequent, such events require appropriate planning and preparation and the ability to provide a response when a community is often at its weakest. We are committed to promoting a culture of resilience and to ensuring that we, as a community, have done everything possible to prevent, mitigate, and manage a catastrophic event.



### GOAL 10A

Enhance the city's capability to respond to natural and manmade disasters and other large-scale incidents.

#### Objectives

1. Ensure an effective leadership structure to guide and sustain the city and the department.
2. Update the city's Emergency Operations Plan, Emergency Operations Center manual and Resource manual.
3. Develop a continuity of operations plan.
4. Identify outdoor refuge locations at parks and recreational facilities.
5. Improve the community's ability to recover from disasters.
6. Test, evaluate and re-test the city's ability to respond to a large-scale incident.
7. Prepare and train for hostile events.

### GOAL 10B

Improve citywide emergency early alert and notification and the ability to communicate with local, state and federal agencies.

#### Objectives

1. Evaluate and improve emergency outdoor notification capabilities, specifically at parks and recreational facilities.
2. Explore and implement solutions for resident and business notifications.
3. Provide for video and web-conferencing capabilities in the city's emergency operations center.
4. Explore and implement a software/web-based emergency operations center/incident management system.

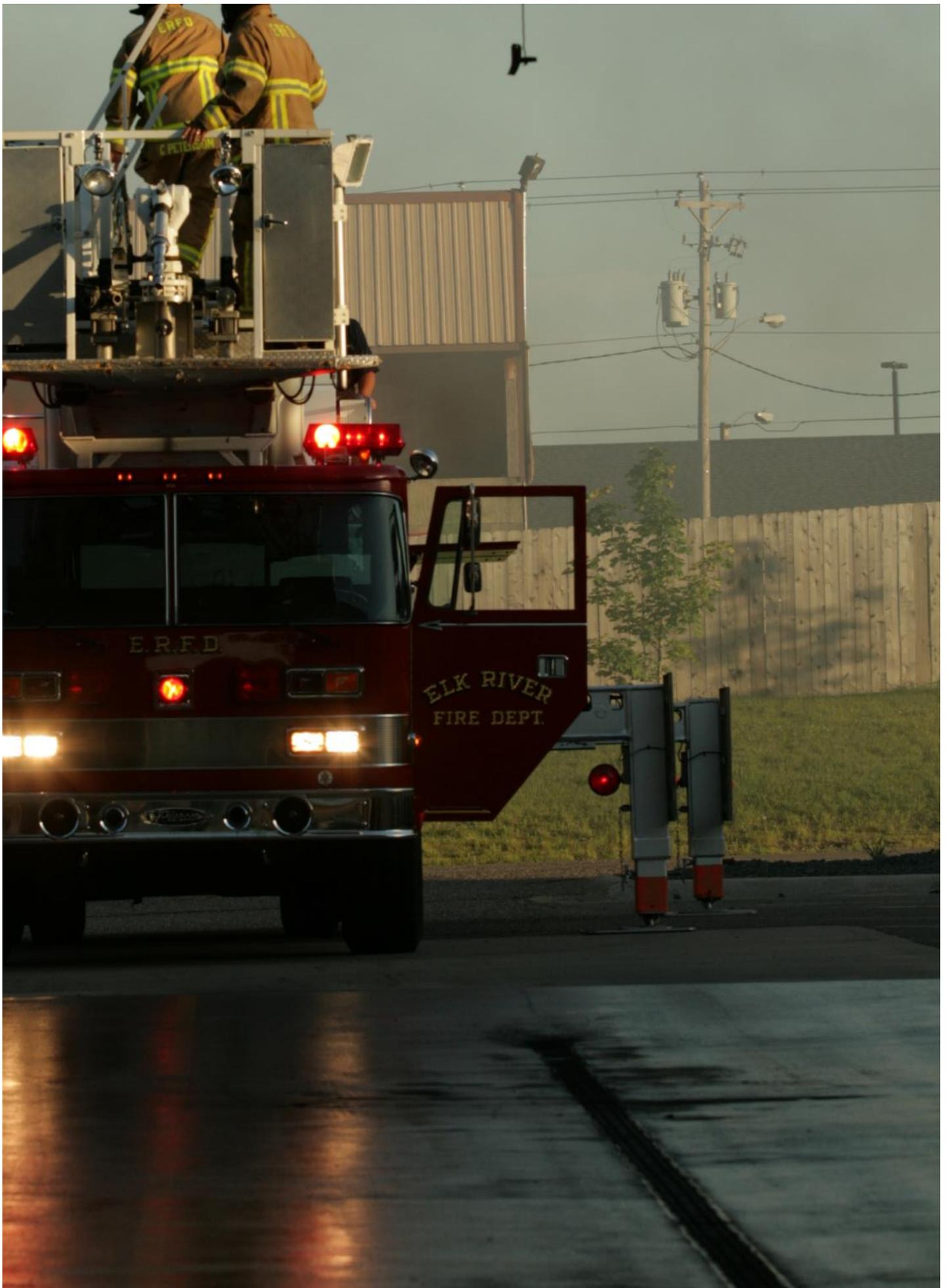


Photo courtesy of Jim Boyle, Elk River Star News

## IMPLEMENTATION METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this strategic plan is to provide a foundation on which to make future decisions. Actual implementation of any strategic initiatives, including goals and objectives, will be prioritized based on available resources, funding and current departmental activity and workload. The plan will be continually reviewed to ensure that the department is proceeding in a direction that is consistent with its mission and core values.

One of the most common complaints about a strategic plan and the process itself is the lack of progress and accountability after the plan is complete and published. The fire department is committed, with the support of the community, to following through with the initiatives, goals and objectives as outlined within. It is imperative that we plan for the future and act on our plan.

To help maintain communication about the department's progress in meeting its goals and objectives, the fire chief is committed to communicating regular status reports to the department, City Council and other stakeholders.

### Thank You

The City of Elk River would like to thank everyone that participated in the strategic planning process for their commitment and dedication.

*"I have no ambition in this world but one, and that is to be a firefighter. The position may, in the eyes of some, appear to be a lowly one; but we who know the work which the firefighter has to do believe that his is a noble calling. There is an adage which says that, 'Nothing can be destroyed except by fire.' We strive to preserve from destruction the wealth of the world which is the product of the industry of men, necessary for the comfort of both the rich and the poor.*

*"We are defenders from fires of the art which has beautified the world, the product of the genius of men and the means of refinement of mankind. (But, above all; our proudest endeavor is to save lives of men-the work of God Himself. Under the impulse of such thoughts, the nobility of the occupation thrills us and stimulates us to deeds of daring, even at the supreme sacrifice. Such considerations may not strike the average mind, but they are sufficient to fill to the limit our ambition in life and to make us serve the general purpose of human society."*

-- Chief Edward F. Croker, FDNY, circa 1910



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