

## **Update to the August 2000 Freeman White Strategic Plan for Emergency Services**

It is the intent of Catawba County Emergency Services to provide the best possible service to the citizens of our County in the least amount of time assuring that efficiency and economics are an integral part of the process. The services include fire, rescue, EMS, and disaster preparedness, but coordinates with other response agencies and jurisdictions to assure a unified response to any emergency is maintained.

This mission statement is supported by the recommendations of the Catawba County Strategic Plan for Emergency Services.

The objective of this document is to provide a review of the Strategic Plan for Catawba County Emergency Services and identify any goals, objectives or recommendations that have not been accomplished. Using that information and keeping in mind the two Board of Commissioners' goals: 1) of a six minute response for Medical First Responders and eight minute response time for ambulance response and 2) securing the best long term use of facilities equipment, personnel and tax payers dollars; our Staff will work with the Emergency Services Planning Committee to finalize an implementation schedule. The Emergency Services Planning Committee was established in the year 2000 and has members representing all public safety disciplines: EMS, Rescue, Fire, Sheriff, Police, Public Health and County Administration.

Background: In 1999 the Board of Commissioners decided it was time to evaluate the needs of the county in regard to fire, rescue, EMS, emergency communications and disaster preparedness. In August 1999, Freeman White, Inc. was retained to develop a long-range, countywide strategic plan, which would insure the best use of taxpayer money in the development of Emergency Services.

On September 12, 2000, the completed plan was presented to the Board of Commissioners. The plan addresses current conditions, challenges facing the system regarding change and a plan that would take Catawba County Emergency Services into the year 2010.

The plan was also presented to the paid and volunteer emergency personnel on two separate occasions. The dates of those presentations were the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> of September 2000. The plan was also posted on the county website for review.

In response to the presentation of the plan, the Board of Commissioners adopted the following goal during its fall planning retreat in October 2000:

After discussion with stakeholders, rescue squad and fire department leadership, EMS personnel and Communications Center personnel, implement immediate, short-term and long-term recommendations, which are:

- A. Provide a countywide response time of not more than 6 minutes for medical first response and 8 minutes for EMS.
- B. Secure the best long-term use of facilities, equipment, and personnel, both paid and volunteer.

- C. Establish an advisory committee comprised of stakeholders.  
Staff was directed to present to the Board of Commissioners by February 2001 a plan for implementation of the Strategic Plan for Catawba County Emergency Services.

The staff recommendation for the strategic plan for emergency services was submitted to the Board of Commissioners on February 5, 2001. It included recommendations to address immediate needs, short-term needs, and long-term needs, which were taken for the goals and recommendations addressed in the Freeman White Catawba County Emergency Services Strategic Plan, which the Board of Commissioners adopted in the Fall of 2000.

Since February 5, 2001, many of the thirteen immediate, five short-term and five long-term needs have been met. The following summary indicates completed goals as well as a few long-term goals that still need to be addressed. The first paragraph under each item outlines the need and the second or following paragraphs indicate the response.

#### **Immediate Needs (Fiscal Year 2001- 2002)**

1. Support an existing agreement for the Hickory Fire Department to assist the Hickory Rescue Squad in providing first responder and basic rescue services within Hickory's corporate limits, to provide a response time of no more than four minutes for first response, and use the agreement as a model for other municipalities in the County, which express interest in providing first response and basic rescue service.

Hickory Fire Department is currently operating as a fire first responder agency with an average response time of 4 minutes. The Hickory Fire Department responds to all Medical First Responder calls within the city limits of Hickory and as needed in the rural portion of their fire district. They are not currently contracted to provide rescue services, but have the capability if that becomes a need. We currently do not compensate Hickory Fire Department for Medical First Responder calls.

2. To reduce the number of false alarms, adopt a False Alarm Ordinance that encourages responsibility by alarm companies, individuals and businesses that repeatedly cause problems with false alarms; and establishes performance standards for alarms. 33.2% of all fire calls received during the past five years was false alarms. Of those, 52% were due to mechanical malfunction of the alarm systems. Responses to false alarms needlessly endanger life and property, tie up valuable fire and emergency communication resources, and cost taxpayers' dollars.

Work on the False Alarm Ordinance started back in the fall of 2000. In March of 2001, a draft of the False Alarm Ordinance was presented to the fire association. The association was not receptive to the draft or idea. Staff asked for their comments and advised they would not move forward until comments were received. No comments were received and therefore, no further action was taken on the issue.

3. Amend the County Code to require house numbers to be visible from roadways for every home, business and major structure in the County. A provision would require numbers on all structures considered new construction. Existing structures would be allowed a reasonable period of time to comply. County Code 14-202 was adopted June 18, 2001. It required citizens and business to display their addresses so Emergency Services could more rapidly find their properties. On existing businesses and residences it was felt no penalty was needed due to the expense of policing it and the fact that the only person who would suffer would be the individual property owner. For new construction, the Building Inspection department holds the Certificate of Occupancy until the numbers are displayed.

4. Representatives of county fire departments noted that only the "on-call" Fire Inspector is allowed to take home a County vehicle after hours. It is recommended that when multiple fire inspectors are called out after working hours, an additional "on-call" fire inspector be allowed to take home a County vehicle after normal working hours.

Because of budget cuts and the increase in fuel costs, we have followed the following procedure. The Fire Marshal has his vehicle 24/7, 7 days a week. The Fire Inspector also has his vehicle 24/7, 7 days a week. The Fire Inspector is also primary back up when Hazardous Material Resources are needed. A second Fire Inspector only takes a vehicle home after hours when he is on call, which is every third week. The Fire Marshal and Fire Inspector can be called as needed for fires if the on call person is on another call.

5. Negotiate an agreement between the County and rescue squads, specifically Hickory and Maiden squads, to allow EMS to use some rescue squad ambulances, paid for by County tax dollars, to provide better emergency service to the citizens of the County until the new replacement units are purchased.

This arrangement was established for a short period of time with Hickory and Maiden until a replacement schedule was implemented. We also now replace rescue ambulances with EMS reserve ambulances when requested by the squads. We currently have replaced a unit in Sherrills Ford and one in Hickory. This eliminates the need for a squad to purchase the ambulance and saves the County money. It also aids with the standardization of equipment. We are currently purchasing at least two fully equipped ambulances a year.

6. Through cooperation with the Sheriff and Communications Center personnel, begin implementing dedicated dispatch, which assigns at least one telecommunicator specifically to each area of emergency services: 1) EMS, 2) fire and rescue and 3) law enforcement. Dedicated dispatch will allow field units to remain in contact with the same telecommunicator, reducing confusion for all staff involved.

Initially, the Communications Center broke the calls into two areas – Law Enforcement and EMS/Fire/Rescue. During a five-person shift, two telecommunicators were dedicated to Law Enforcement, two to EMS/Fire/Rescue and one served as a supervisor and backup call taker. After attempting to implement the system, it was found that the two telecommunicators handling the law enforcement calls would also be handling 911 calls related to EMS/Fire/Rescue. At times, it became somewhat overwhelming and therefore, it became apparent that it would be difficult to continue to operate under that scenario. Further, at the time when dedicated dispatch was being considered, the EMD (Emergency Medical Dispatch) protocol was not in existence. Once the EMD protocol was implemented, it became even harder to dedicate telecommunicators to particular types of telephone calls, especially in light of the fact that EMD protocol would take longer and would be related only to EMS/Rescue/Fire calls. The EMD protocol is a series of questions that is asked of the caller to confirm the telephone number, address and nature of complaint. The information is relayed to responders to better prepare them when they arrive on the scene. Further, the amount of administrative calls processed by the Communications Center was and continues to be staggering. All telecommunicators answer administrative calls. Therefore, unless the Communications Center was not busy, it became very difficult to maintain a true dedicated dispatch system. Rather, the practice now is that a telecommunicator will stay with a particular call until the call is released. In the event that back up is needed, a free telecommunicator can step in and assist a high intensity situation.

Until the Communications Center is alleviated of answering administrative calls, it will be virtually impossible to implement a true dedicated dispatch system. The EMD protocol has been modified and has allowed the telecommunicators to improve the time calls are held in dispatch before being released. The improvement has been significant, resulting in the saving of three lives during its first three months of operation. Although a true dedicated dispatch system has not been implemented, citizens' should know that the telecommunicators can handle any types of calls that are received in an efficient and expedient manner.

7. By March 2001, add four additional non-sworn, professional, career minded telecommunicators to handle increased call volumes, reduce stress levels, and implement a dedicated dispatch system. In addition, one telecommunicator will work a floating shift from 5:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m., Monday through Friday.

Since March 2001, the Communications Center has added 7 non-sworn telecommunicators. The floating, 5:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m., position was not implemented. Current staffing is 5 on first shift, 5 on second shift, and 4 on third shift. If someone is out they utilize a part-time person if available. If not, they are down one position. The day shift has 1 position that also serves as a trainer and may be out of the 911-center training when call load allows. They currently have 1 administrator and 1 secretary. The majority of their call volume remains non-emergency (911) calls.

8. Assign an additional person to staff the Records Division, to begin the process of instituting coverage 24 hours per day, 7 days a week in order to relieve some of the workload in the Communications Center.

The records division has hired 2 positions since 2001. This has only helped marginally due to their workload and availability.

9. To improve EMS response times, in March 2001 bring Sherrills Ford and Propst EMS Bases to full-service through the addition of eight full-time paramedics. Average countywide response times have exceeded eight minutes and are coming close to nine for Propst and Newton bases and approaching ten minutes for parts of the Catawba service area. These additional personnel will help reduce these times.

Propst EMS Base and Sherrills Ford EMS Base were staffed and operational in March of 2001. The addition of these bases did improve response times dramatically. We currently have a service wide average of just less than 8 minutes. Another key to the drop in response time was the implementation of a moving system, which required trucks to move to the middle of two districts when a unit was out of place. Along with the additional transport ambulances our response time is less than 8 minutes.

10. To provide more efficient EMS operations, in March 2001 provide a supervisor for each shift who is not working on an ambulance. These supervisors would be responsible for coordination and administration of shift personnel and resources, and could also act as quick response units for emergency situations.

This was accomplished in March 2001. The supervisors play a key role in day-to-day operations of the EMS system. They coordinate with the Specialty Services Coordinator to assure transfers and emergency calls do not conflict with each other. They have been available units during peak times when calls exceed the capabilities of our regular units, as well as playing a valuable role in the management of large incidents. Their secondary role is to assure major events in the county are covered without jeopardizing emergency operations.

11. Evaluate the location of current EMS bases to identify strategic locations for future bases that allow for response times of no more than eight minutes and adequate coverage of the entire County. Consider co-location of EMS bases with fire and rescue bases. By July 1, 2001, develop a plan that establishes future base locations and identifies a time frame and cost plan for new bases.

A plan was created previously, but has been modified due to changes in the County. Oxford Base was completed in 2004 and was operational as a daytime ambulance and nighttime Quick Response Vehicle due to budget cuts. The impact of a QRV was obvious during this year. Two units were engaged when Oxford was staffed as a QRV (non transport capable unit). We are presently reviewing our base needs. We have met with Bandy's Fire Department about a possible joint location but based on data from Catawba Base we need to address their response times. We will address this further in our Emergency Services long-term goals.

12. Direct staff to select and begin working with an Emergency Services Advisory Committee made up of two members of each fire, rescue, EMS, and the Communications Center. This committee will provide staff with input concerning long-term issues that impact the County's emergency services.

This committee has been operational since 2002 and has worked mainly on grants over the past 2 years. This group was challenged with distributions of Homeland Security Grant money and projects as well as looking at the impact it will have on our every day response capabilities. This group has been instrumental in making prudent expenditures of grant funds. In the February meeting they were made aware we would be addressing long-range plans in Emergency Services. We plan to present the final draft of the second phase of the implementation of the Freeman White Strategic Plan this May.

13. Through presentations in the County's high schools, community college, and job fairs, increase efforts to recruit interested volunteers for fire departments and rescue squads, especially those that can respond to calls during business hours. Explore options in terms of providing special benefits for volunteers including tax incentives and employment protection.

In 2000-2001 there were Public Service Announcements that ran on the local cable channels. There has been limited activity in that area during the past 2+ years. One of the strengths of the new Rescue Coordinator is his background in recruiting. He has been given direction to work with the squads and help them develop Public Service Announcements and school programs. We have assisted two squads with creating Junior Rescue Programs.

#### **Short-Term Needs (Fiscal Year 2001-2002)**

1. Evaluate the interest and ability of County municipalities to provide first response/basic rescue services.

Over the past 2 years we have been meeting with the City of Newton regarding a possible interest in Rescue and Medical First Response by the city fire department. Currently we have two cities interested; Hickory, who is currently providing these services; and Newton, with whom we are still in conversation. The City of Conover has an interest only if no money from the city would be required. We will continue to pursue this in our long-term plan if it is necessary to achieve the response time outcome.

2. Work to establish specialized response teams, including trench rescue, high angle/rope rescue, and confined space rescue and, if feasible, develop a plan for placing such teams into action.

We currently have a committee working on a Specialty Rescue Team, or Federal Emergency Management Agency defined Urban Area Search and Rescue Team (USAR), to address technical rescue in Catawba County. The plan is to create a multi agency USAR team that would contract with Emergency Services to provide technical rescue. The plan and standard operating procedures are written. The committee is currently getting members to sign on and making presentations to the various response agencies in the county. The last hurdle is to find creative ways to fund the team. We have used grant money for equipment and training up to this point. The standard operating procedures do include procedures for deployment.

3. Establish a professional telecommunications career track through changes in personnel policies to discontinue the transfer of telecommunicators to road patrol positions. Cooperate with the Sheriff to explore the potential of moving the Communications Center to a department supervised by the County Manager.

All telecommunicators currently employed are non-sworn officers who desire a career in the telecommunications field. They are Emergency Medical Dispatch (EMD) trained and certified as telecommunicators, not road officers. Jerry Boggs was hired as the first Communications Center Administrator and that department is currently under the County Manager's Office.

4. Adopt an ambulance replacement schedule for EMS that allows for new, fully equipped ambulances to be purchased each year beginning in fiscal year 2001-2002.

A replacement schedule was developed in 2001-2002 and we have been purchasing at least 2 fully equipped ambulances each year. Again we are also supplying the rescue squads with replacement ambulances, which is a savings to the County.

5. Evaluate the need to restructure EMS shift schedules in order to establish the best shift schedule that maintains or improves service levels and employee morale.

The current schedule is meeting the needs of our staff and the citizens of the County. We have the highest morale we have had in years as well as maintaining the highest level of training allowed. This system, with our call volume, allows staff members to work 12 hours at a time, which has proven to not over tax employees in the way a 24-hour shift would. We also are getting numerous applications per opening, which is an indicator that Catawba County Emergency Medical Service is a desirable service for which to work. We feel at this time a change is not indicated.

## **Long-Term Needs (Beyond Fiscal Year 2001-2002)**

Establish an Emergency Services Advisory Committee to work with and provide input to County Staff on Major long-range issues, including the following:

1. Realignment of fire, rescue and EMS service district boundaries;

In July 2002 adjustments were made to rescue, fire and EMS districts. The fire districts were only adjusted in areas that were mutually agreed upon by the departments involved. The complexity of how the boundaries were put in place and the fact that any change had monetary impact, were the reasons for this slight adjustment. The rescue squad boundaries were changed to improve response times, taking travel distance into consideration. EMS boundaries were decided to be the county lines with units being dispatched based on their relationship to the call, meaning closest unit to the call.

After new goals are set, it may be necessary to revisit the boundaries.

2. Evaluation of the need for paid employees for volunteer fire and rescue;

To be evaluated by the Emergency Services Committee in the next few months. The need for paid staff to meet response time needs has become evident in rescue and fire.

3. Development of service districts for the provision of emergency services to unincorporated, urban areas of the County;
4. The feasibility of merging some or all of the County's fire departments and rescue squads;
5. The need for implementation of an 800 MHz radio communication system;

The long-term goals continue to be researched at this time and will be a part of the next phase of the Emergency Services Plan implementation.

## Revenue Sources for the Strategic Plan Implementation

There was also funding associated with the implementation of the plan. The following is a summary of the sources of funding associated with implementation of the Freeman White Strategic Plan to date:

	<u>FY 2003-2004</u>	<u>FY 2004-2005</u>
<b>1 Cent Tax from Water and Sewer</b>	1,300,000	1,339,000
<b>Revenue for Implementation of Emergency Svc Plan</b>	300,000	309,000
<b>Revenue from Facilities Director Position</b>	60,000	61,800
<b>Emergency Services Plan Implementation</b>		
Sherrills Ford and Propst EMS Bases	365,954	376,932
Crew Chiefs – 4 Positions	264,659	272,599
911 Staff - 7 Positions	254,324	261,954
Records Staff – 2 Positions	87,251	89,869
Lease on 4 Ambulances	67,033	53,200
3 New Ambulances	<u>450,000</u>	<u>463,500</u>
Total Costs	1,489,220	1,518,053
<b>Deficit – General Fund Contribution</b>	170,780	191,747
<b>Emergency Services Plan Funded by Medicare Fee Schedule Increase</b>		
Fee Schedule Increase	200,000	240,000
<b>Emergency Services 1<sup>st</sup> Responder Implementation</b>		
Oxford Base	296,908	512,154
1 <sup>st</sup> Responder Program with Rescue Squads	240,000	247,200
Rescue Coordinator	52,675	54,255
Less Funding from the Rescue Squads	(26,000)	(26,780)
Net Rescue Coordinator Costs	26,675	27,475
<b>Total Costs</b>	563,583	786,829

The remainder of this report will focus on the next phase of the implementation of the Freeman White Strategic Plan. All of the proposed tasks, goals and objectives are contained in the study. There are two tasks associated with implementation of the immediate needs and two goals with corresponding objectives associated with implementation of long-term needs.

**I. Immediate needs as identified in the Freeman White Strategic Plan for Emergency Services:**

- A. To reduce the number of false alarms, adopt a false alarm ordinance that encourages responsibility by alarm companies, individuals and businesses that repeatedly cause problems with false alarms and establish performance standards for alarms. The fire alarm ordinance should also support availability of personnel and equipment.

History: False alarms needlessly endanger the public and fire personnel. They also take volunteer firemen away from their primary jobs. With the economy in its current state, employers are less willing to allow volunteer members to respond while at work. The Fire Association, Fire Marshal and the County Attorney previously addressed the alarm ordinance. It was not pursued at that time for various reasons, mainly the time commitment needed to address the issue and the other items and other needs being addressed as a part of the plan. Because of the reduction in volunteerism and the reasons stated in Freeman Whites Plan, it is my recommendation to allow the Emergency Services Planning Committee with the assistance of the County Attorney to revisit the alarm ordinance.

Timeline: The ordinance will be addressed at a November 2005 meeting. A recommendation to implement or not should be made by December 2005.

- B. Through presentations in the County High Schools, Community College and Job Fairs, increase efforts to recruit interested volunteers for Fire Departments and Rescue Squads.

History: the Freeman White Strategic Plan addressed multiple reasons for the decline of volunteer resources including the economy and social pressures. Their recommendation as is ours, is to continue to develop a recruitment program in cooperation with the Fire and Rescue Associations to be presented to the public in various formats. Also, explore options in terms of special benefits for volunteers including tax incentives and employment protection.

Timeline: The Fire Marshal and Rescue Coordinator will meet with their respective associations and develop recruitment programs suitable for distribution to the public. These programs will be presented in several formats to be completed by August 2005. They will also have a list of recommendations for volunteer incentives developed and presented to the Emergency Services Director for implementation by January 2006.

## **II. Long-term needs as identified in the Freeman White Strategic Plan for Emergency Services:**

- A. Realignment of Fire, Rescue and EMS service district boundaries.
- B. Evaluation of the need for paid employees for Fire and Rescue.
- C. Development of service districts for the provision of Emergency Services to unincorporated urban areas of the County.
- D. The feasibility of merging some or all of the County's Fire Departments and Rescue Squads.
- E. The need for implementation of an 800 Mhz radio communication system.

The following goals include the outstanding long-term needs identified in the Freeman White Strategic Plan and the staff recommendations from February 5, 2001. In addition, the following goals include additional items that relate to the previously approved goals by the Board of Commissioners and therefore have been included in the long-term plan.

### **GOAL #1: Assure adequate responsiveness of the Emergency Services delivery system.**

Definition: Responsiveness is impacted by characteristics such as the following: effective communications, availability of personnel, availability of equipment, development density and geography. With that in mind the following support the goal of adequate responsiveness of the Emergency Services delivery system.

**OBJECTIVE 1:** Develop a system that assures the timely availability of personnel and equipment and meets the Board of Commissioners' goal of 6 minutes for Medical First Responders and 8 minutes for ambulances.

- a. Establish district boundaries and organizational structures that make the best use of taxpayers' dollars in the deployment of emergency personnel and equipment. The boundaries should also take into consideration:
  - Insurance ratings
  - Geography
  - Population density
  - Residential, commercial and industrial development
  - Transportation patterns.

History: The Freeman White Strategic Plan recommended the realignment of fire, rescue, and EMS district boundaries. While they were addressed separately in Freeman White's study it is recommended by staff that district change recommendations be incorporated with consolidation of services as well as taking into consideration economics, state rules and regulations, geography and population density.

The concept of charging municipal fire departments with the responsibility of providing fire, rescue, and medical first response services is still sound. Three of the seven departments currently have the paid and volunteer staff to effectively proceed. It needs to be understood that four of the fire departments would need additional time to prepare for the change.

The district changes should be based on the ability of the current stations to provide the citizens with rated fire protection as defined by the North Carolina Department of Insurance as well as when appropriate the mandated Board of Commissioners' response time for medical first response.

The Oxford model of combining multiple agencies on one campus should be considered when new bases are needed.

It is understood with this type of restructuring there will be a need for moving and eliminating existing facilities.

It was recommended that EMS boundaries reflect the new fire and rescue district lines. While this is possible it is not the most efficient way to dispatch EMS units. Because of the transport requirement of EMS these units are frequently out of their district. This makes dispatching based on districts cumbersome at best. It is recommended that technology be considered to incorporate GPS tracking into GIS mapping to keep the communications staff aware of crews location. This will allow for the County to be the EMS district boundary and will give the dispatcher the ability to send the closest unit to the call.

Timeline: The idea of realigning districts and consolidating services is a complex issue and would need to be addressed carefully. A series of meetings with the municipalities should take place prior to October 2005. After the initial input from the municipalities the Emergency Services Steering Committee would need to develop a plan to proceed which should be in place by January 2006. Because of the complexity of these changes complete restructuring may take several years. Evaluate the Board of Commissioners adopted 6 and 8-minute response time criteria currently being used to measure timely response of Emergency Services Personnel. Staff will explore the need to include Communications Center dispatch times and determine if a percentage measured response time will more adequately represent the services that are provided to the public. The Emergency Services staff will work with the Emergency Services Planning Committee to assure these recommendations are completed by January 2007.

b. Provide personnel to respond to emergencies.

History: The medical first response pilot project now known as the Medical First Response Program was developed to address the need of paid personnel necessary to meet the mandated 6-minute response time requirement for medical first response implemented by the Board of Commissioners. The Freeman White plan also addressed the need to consider paid responders citing many reasons for the declining volunteer responders. Ongoing evaluation of this issue is needed and addressed in the following timeline.

Timeline: 1 – Complete monthly analysis of Medical First Response calls to insure they comply with the Board of Commissioners’ mandated response time criteria of 6 minutes. The information will be analyzed to determine if a lack of personnel was the cause of not meeting the response time. This review is in place at this time and will continue on a monthly basis. 2 – Evaluate emergency responder rosters to assure adequate personnel are available to respond to emergency calls. 3 – This issue will also be addressed in the consolidation and redistricting of emergency services addressed in objective 1a of this document. Complete by January 2006

- c. Establish contract criteria that meet adopted Board of Commissioners’ response time mandate.

History: In October 2000 the Catawba County Board of Commissioners adopted a response time criteria for medical first response and EMS. In Freeman White’s plan they recommended a response time not only for EMS and medical first response but suggested a 9-minute response time for fire departments responding to structure fires endorsed by the North Carolina Department of Insurance. With contract services, response times must be controlled through contracts specifying desired services.

Timeline: 1 - Rescue Coordinator with the assistance of the County Attorney is developing a Rescue / Medical First Response contract that will address response time criteria. Contract will be in place by July 2005. 2 – EMS is reviewing their response time on a monthly basis and is listed quarterly in an outcome report. 3 – Fire Marshal to work with County Attorney to evaluate current fire contracts. Implement changes to include response time criteria. Contract will be in place July 2006 and reviewed annually thereafter.

**OBJECTIVE 2:** Assure adequate well-maintained facilities to support the delivery of emergency services within Catawba County.

History: Fire, rescue, and EMS bases are predominately individual agency facilities. Locations have been determined by 20-year-old district boundaries rarely considering stations located in close proximity to their base. This has in a lot of cases created overlap between departments. The current Oxford facility incorporated three agencies on one campus. Even though this was an improvement over current arrangements additional information must be considered before building a facility. Traffic congestion is a major issue at many emergency services bases and should be addressed in the site location process.

- a. Revisit dangerous base locations as related to traffic hazards. Many base locations in Catawba County because of traffic congestion, population density and poor design are unable to efficiently and safely enter the roadway. This was addressed in the Freeman White Study and was tabled due to budget. This issue still exists and needs to be addressed.
- b. Develop a five-year facility plan for Emergency Services. Because of changes in growth in Catawba County and the desire of the County to adjust existing boundaries it is necessary to readdress facility placement based on these changes.

- c. Revisit the need for appropriate service technicians needed to service the Emergency Services fleet. As addressed in the Freeman White Strategic Plan, Emergency Services vehicles are becoming more technically advanced and are exceeding the capabilities of the existing maintenance personnel. We routinely have to outsource these vehicles to vendors and in some cases outside our County. In so doing, we are tying up equipment and personnel, thus costing additional County dollars.

Timeline: 1 – Revisit dangerous base locations as related to traffic hazards, which was a recommendation of the Freeman White Plan. Budget and make recommendations to resolve the hazardous conditions in place by January 2006. 2 - Develop five-year facility plan for Emergency Services to be completed by January 2006. This was a goal outlined in Freeman White Plan. 3 – Revisit the need for appropriate service technicians needed to service the more complex vehicles within the Emergency Services fleet. Work with the Fleet Manager to develop justification and budget request by January 2006.

**OBJECTIVE 3: Develop an effective interoperable communication system.**

- a. Development of radio specifications for portable and mobile radios within the County's response agencies.

History: The Emergency Services Steering Committee identified the need to utilize grant funds to replace aging radio equipment within the County's response agencies. As a result the committee agreed to have the Communications Center personnel develop a set of radio specifications, which will be used as a bid specification for purchases as well as to be adopted as a standard specification for radio replacement by Emergency Service agencies. The specifications will assure radio purchases will operate within our system design and aid with radio interoperability. Additionally a second recommendation will be presented to the Emergency Services Steering Committee to allow the Communications Center personnel to develop a set of standards for base radios.

Timeline: The specifications for portable and mobile radios will be in place by May 2005. The specification for base radios will be place by July 2005.

- b. Develop and implement a radio system that will deliver 95% portable radio receive and transmit capabilities.

History: The RF Committee has been working on Phase One of a radio project that will deliver 95% portable transmit and receive capabilities. The system utilizes a series of voter receive sites and two additional transmit sites to accomplish the goal of 95% coverage. This system will address current coverage issues with the system.

Timeline: Phase one is anticipated to be implemented by July 1, 2005, however current issues with the City of Hickory may delay this project until details can be agreed upon.

- c. Develop infrastructure able to support interoperable communications.

History: A long-term recommendation of the Freeman White Strategic Plan was to have the Emergency Services Planning Committee explore the need for the implementation of an 800 MHz radio system. Early exploration of the RF Committee defined the \$26 million dollar price tag was not an option for the County at the present time. Currently, the Emergency Services staff in cooperation with the Communications Center staff is working with the NC Highway Patrol to pursue two separate grants that will build four tower sites in Catawba County; these sites will house the NC 800 MHz VIPER radio system as well as our equipment. The towers will replace three older non-expandable towers as well as add a new tower in the Highway 16 North area. Additionally we are working with Charlotte Mecklenburg Emergency Management and Police Department on an interoperable communications project. The project combines two grants, which will put technology in our County that will tie multiple radio frequencies together to all communications between counties as well as our own responders. It also will allow video conferencing capabilities between counties.

Recommendation: Continue to renew our current 800 MHz license through assistance from the NC Highway Patrol. Keep 800 MHz in our future plans if money becomes available and put our focus on interoperability, coverage and build out of our infrastructure.

Timeline: Award of the LEETP grant and the DHS grants should be decided by July 2005. Construction schedule and timelines will have to be determined. The Mecklenburg interoperability project is currently in progress. Equipment lists from counties are due April 2005. New equipment to be purchased by Charlotte in May 2005. It is anticipated that this project will take at least 6 months after the equipment arrives. Updates will be made as construction schedules are decided.

- d. Establish interoperable communications between communications center and field operations.

History: The intent is to develop a mobile command post capable of supporting field communications and serving as an interface between the field, EOC and, Communications Center as well as serving as a temporary E911 backup in the event primary communications is lost.

Timeline: Project to be completed by January 2006.

OBJECTIVE 4: Assure the Emergency Preparedness Programs addresses safety of all citizens during times of disaster.

History: Catawba County Emergency Services has multiple projects in progress designed to assure readiness in times of disaster. A strategic plan and timeline for the implementation of these projects needs to be developed. This will assure these projects correlate with the Counties Emergency Services Strategic Plan and the wishes of the Board of Commissioners. However, the following objectives have a more immediate need.

- a. Implementation of National Incident Management System (NIMS). In order to be eligible for Federal funding, Catawba County Emergency Services is mandated to implement NIMS. Freeman White addressed the need to implement a standard Incident Command System throughout the County. Not only will NIMS address this issue but will address the following components:
- Standardized organizational structures, processes and procedures;
  - Standards for planning, training and exercising, and personnel qualification standards;
  - Equipment acquisition and certification standards;
  - Interoperable communications processes, procedures and systems;
  - Information management systems; and
  - Supporting technologies – voice and data communications systems, information systems, data display systems and specialized technologies.
- b. Develop a strategic plan to implement, by priority, the numerous ongoing Emergency Services projects.

Timeline: 1- Working with the Assistant County Manager and legal staff, implement ordinance NIMS by January 2006. 2 - Working with the Emergency Services Planning Committee, the Local Emergency Planning Committee and the Assistant County Manager to develop a system plan for Emergency Services projects and programs. Will be in place by January 2006.

**GOAL #2: Assure funding to support the implementation of the Emergency Services Strategic Plan.**

OBJECTIVE 1: Maximize existing funds to provide Emergency Services insuring the best use of taxpayers' dollars.

History: As stated in Freeman White's Plan legislation is in place to make changes in current fire tax district designations to allow for service districts to be created to fund fire and rescue services in unincorporated areas. Currently fire tax districts generate approximately \$2.8 million dollars, which fund 16 rural fire departments. The general fund supports the approximately \$800,000 currently being spent on medical first response, back-up ambulance service, and rescue services. The creation of service districts would allow fire, rescue, and medical first response services to be funded and provided for in a more streamlined and efficient manner.

Timeline: Working with the Emergency Services Steering Committee, Finance Director, Budget Director, Fire Marshall, County Attorney, and Rescue Coordinator develop a plan to introduce service district boundaries to fund fire, medical first response, and rescue services by July 2006.

OBJECTIVE 2: Utilize grant funds to develop programs and supplement equipment purchases when feasible.

History: Emergency Services since 2002 has been able to acquire Homeland Security Grants yearly, as well as Hazard Mitigation Grant monies. These funds have been used for various projects to include EMS base generators, purchase of equipment for Homeland Security use as well as an ID badge system for security and personnel accountability. We have also worked with the 13 Urban Area Initiative Counties and the North Carolina Highway Patrol to secure grants for interoperable radio communications equipment.

Timeline: This is an ongoing effort of the office.

**I. Immediate needs**

- A. Creation of a False Alarm Ordinance that will support personnel and equipment. December 2005
- B. Development of recruitment program for volunteer Emergency Services Personnel. January 2006

**II. Long-term needs**

Goal 1	Assure adequate responsiveness of the Emergency Services delivery system	Goal to be completed by January 2007
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Objective 1      Develop a system that assures the timely availability of personnel and equipment, and medical first response times of 6 minutes and ambulance 8 minutes.

- a. Establish district boundaries and organizational that make the best use of taxpayers dollars in the deployment of emergency personnel and equipment.
  - \* Meeting with municipalities by –October 2005
  - \*Develop plan by –January 2006
  - \*Response Time Criteria Reviewed and Implemented by January 2007
- b. Provide personnel to respond to emergencies.
  - Medical 1st response criteria- Ongoing
  - Evaluate rosters- January 2006
- c. Establish contract criteria that meets adopted Board of Commissioners Response Time mandate.
  - Rescue Contracts- June 2005
  - EMS response time review- Ongoing
  - Fire Dept. Contracts- July 2006

Objective 2      Assure adequate well-maintained facilities to support the delivery of emergency services within Catawba County.

	a. Revisit dangerous base locations as related to traffic hazards.	January 2006
	b. Develop 5-year facility plan for Emergency Services.	January 2006
	c. Revisit need for appropriate service technicians needed to service the Emergency Services fleet.	January 2006
Objective 3	Develop an effective interoperable communication system.	
	a. Development of radio specifications for portable and mobile radios within the Counties response agencies.	Portable/mobile radios- May 2005 Base radios- July 2005
	b. Develop and implement a radio system that will deliver 95% portable radio receive and transmit capabilities.	July 2005
	c. Develop infrastructure able to support interoperable communications.	Updated as construction schedules are decided.
	d. Establish interoperable communications between communications center and field operations.	January 2006
Objective 4	Assure the Emergency Preparedness Programs addresses safety of all citizens during times of disaster.	
	a. Implementation of National Incident Management System (NIMS)	January 2006
	b. Develop a strategic plan to implement, by priority, the numerous ongoing Emergency Services projects.	January 2006

Goal 2	Assure funding to support the implementation of the Emergency Services Strategic Plan.	Goal to be completed- July 2008
Objective 1	Maximize existing funds to provide Emergency Services, ensuring the best use of taxpayers dollars.	July 2006
Objective 2	Utilize grant funds to develop programs and supplement equipment purchases when feasible.	Ongoing