



STUDY SESSION

County Commission

Courthouse
206 W. 1st Avenue
Hutchinson, KS 67501

A G E N D A

**Reno County Courthouse Veterans Room
206 W. 1st Avenue
Hutchinson, KS 67501
Wednesday, August 30, 2023, 9:15 AM**

1. **Study Items**
 - 1.A Fire Districts Strategic Planning
2. **Adjournment**

Randy Parks
District 1

Ron Hirst
District 2

Daniel P. Friesen
District 3

John Whitesel
District 4

Don Bogner
District 5

Merging of Fire Districts

A DOCUMENT TO STUDY AND EXPLORE FUTURE OPTIONS

ADAM WEISHAAR

Abstract:

The autonomy of fire districts has been a hot topic for decades. When 5Bugle Training and Consulting completed a county wide fire study in 2020-2021, they discovered memorandums pointing out concerns of the district's management policies from the 1980s. While the fire service in Reno County continued to evolve, the management practices did not change, creating new concerns. The lack of change and advancement since the 1980s is a reflection on previous leadership. It is noted that the current leadership and Board of County Commissioners (BOCC), who also serve as the Fire Board, have acknowledged the current situation, supports, and expects improvements.

This document aims to present the potential advantages of merging the eight (8) rural fire districts into a single unified fire service. The merger of the fire districts has gained attention as a strategic approach to enhance firefighting capabilities and response, while optimizing resource allocation. This document will show the recent history of the fire districts, short- and long-term shortfalls, various options to explore and a recommended course of action by county staff. Findings show the rationale for unifying the fire districts, highlighting the potential to create a more effective, sustainable, and well-equipped firefighting force to better serve the needs of the community. This document is designed to spur open conversations between the Board of County Commissioners and county staff, and ultimately have a clear direction and support.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary or abstract.....1
Table of Contents.....2

Section:

I: History.....3
II: Current Operations.....12
III: Structure and Mil Levees.....14
IV: Options.....15
V: Benefits.....16
VI: Considerations.....18
VII: Recommendations.....19

Attachments:

- I: Fire Chiefs’ Memorandum for Record
- II: Resolution 2022-08
- III: Special Equipment Funding Forecasts
- IV: Fire District Map
- V: Five Bugle Fire Service Survey, Evaluation And Development Study and Recommendations

I. **History:**

In recent years, with the support of the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) Reno County Emergency Management, and the County Administrator have recognized that the reorganization of the fire districts is necessary to benefit the citizens who are served, not one fire department or district individually. The focus must remain on the county as a whole.

In 2019 the Reno County Board of Commissioners (BOCC) requested a study be completed to determine the future of the fire districts in Reno County. 5Bugle Training and Consulting was contracted and provided a written survey to each Fire District Chief, a site visit to each fire district, and meetings with the Reno County Emergency Management Director, County Administrator, and County Counselor.

On May 7, 2021, the Reno County Commissioners held a study session to hear the findings of the county fire study completed (Attachment V) by 5Bugle Training and Consulting. At that study session, 5Bugle Training and Consulting presented the following prospectives from the fire districts:

- We are one County, but entirely different Fire Districts
- Notable quote: “It’s their (Fire District’s) game, and they can do anything they want.”
- There is a vast difference in the way District’s do things; some do their own thing without including the Fire Board in the process.
- Bureaucracy of current system is cumbersome.
- Considers their District isolated from others, falling behind.
- Current technology “over-the-head” of most chiefs and they are unwilling to pay for it and incorporate it into their operations.
- Disparities in Leadership Vision
- There is a low level of understanding of what it takes to be a fire chief throughout the system; demonstrated by actions or lack of actions.
- Departments do not promote training; one FF paid to get his own training; “They all just sit around and B.S.”
- “People like being part of something that is done right; Give us good equipment, good training and a good system and we will do good work!”
- The County ‘dabbles’ in managing the Fire Districts; friendships and politics impact what they get involved in; County needs to be all-in or not at all.
- Doing what ‘needs’ to be done as a chief would take 30-40 hours/month; not paid enough for that amount of work.

- Ability of Fire Districts to work together is ‘middle of the road;’ continuity is rated as a ‘6’ out of ‘10.’
- Districts’ expectation for continuity and mutual expectations drifted apart due to differing opinions and not wanting to anger anyone.
- Resulted in a “Do what you want” situation.
- *Progress is held back because things ‘look good’ from the outside.*

5Bugle also presented the following “Common Perspectives”:

- Would like to see standardized equipment, such as interchangeable SCBA tanks.
- Need standards for apparatus and years-of-service policy.
- In mutual aid situations, firefighters or task force will find unorganized scenes in terms of ICS; concern for FF safety.
- Organized approach to purchasing could save Districts money and provide more consistency in equipment, etc.
- Common administration efforts would benefit Districts.
- A County Fire Chief would bring consistency and help alleviate problem areas that exist in some Districts.
- Poor Relationship with Fire Board

5Bugle presented the following “operational Considerations”:

- Half or fewer calls have sufficient staff responding.
- Limited Standard Operating Guidelines (SOG’s)
- Limited understanding and utilization of Incident Command System (ICS)
- Over-reliance on resources from other Fire Districts (no motivation to improve District’s services)
- Safety-compromising actions observed.
- Concerns over the age of the equipment and apparatus
- Fire Stations in need of maintenance and/or replacement
- Locations of fire stations not conducive to effective responses
- Incident Command principles are being followed inconsistently, challenging in mutual aid situations.

Some of the other notable findings from 5Bugle Training and Consulting included the “no real overall sense of urgency towards training, response policies, firefighter safety, or best

management practices.” And a “notable desire for centralized leadership and coordinated management and response efforts.”

At the meeting where the study was presented, Commissioner Sellers moved, and Commissioner Hirst seconded “that the County Administrator confer with the District Fire Chiefs on ways to implement the recommendations. The County Administrator’s initial focus should be the Mandated Improvements outlined in portions of Article 1, paragraph D. on page 9 of the Report”. Below are the recommendations from the study that were discussed:

I. Mandate Improvements That Meet Current Fire Service Best Practices:

- A. The Board of County Commissioners, as the governing authority over the fire districts, create a process in which all of the individual fire district fire chiefs are mandated to improve practices including, but not limited to, the development of common management and operational practices, such as Standard Operating Guidelines (SOG’s), budgeting procedures (including a Capital Improvement Plan [CIP]), training practices, officer development and planning efforts. The Board of County Commissioners would hold the chiefs accountable (as they should currently be doing) or provide someone that has the support of the Board with the administrative/ operational authority over the districts to ensure compliance.

Those fire chiefs that refuse to cooperate and comply with the Board’s directive are to be relieved of their duties.

- B. Develop or use an established curriculum for a Chief Officer training program. The curriculum should be adapted to Reno County’s needs to assist chief officers attain the skills to successfully perform the duties outlined in the fire chief job description.
- C. Create a liaison fire chief position from among the fire district fire chiefs to function as the representative of the fire districts to discuss issues, bring ideas and recommendations or otherwise creatively problem solve with the Board of County Commissioners.
- D. Create and adopt a Strategic Plan to set priorities for meeting the County’s fire service needs, focus energy and resources to accomplish each priority, strengthen operations and ensure that the fire chief, his/her chief officers, local officers, firefighters, and other stakeholders are working toward common goals. The strategic plan will help establish mutual agreement on intended outcomes and assess and adjust the organization’s direction in response to a changing environment.

The Strategic Plan may include an analysis of current fire district boundaries along with any recommended changes, or the development of practices that ensure compliance with current state statutes that regulate how emergency services can be delivered outside a fire district.

It would also address the state of fire district infrastructure, including a refurbishment and/or replacement schedule and how to innovatively address the needs of fire districts that face fiscal constraints as part of the greater County Fire Department.

II. Consolidate Current Fire Districts into One District with One Fire Chief:

- A. Establish a system that allows individual Townships to retain their identity as a member of the greater fire protection system yet supports centralized management and a collaborative decision-making process that include purchasing policies that are developed based on need and safety benefits.
- B. Allocate budget dollars across current fire district borders to be able to spend monies where the most critical need is, ensuring minimum standards are met throughout the County.
- C. Centralize training and other critical aspects that impact operational preparedness and performance.
- D. Each former fire district to be led by a local chief officer (deputy or battalion chief).
- E. The points under recommendation 'I' remain applicable and are incorporated into this recommendation.

Note: This recommendation revisits the 1999 idea of consolidating the volunteer fire districts into one district, to be led by one professional fire chief; the district could be subdivided into several response districts to provide for optimal response times from the existing fire stations, with each response district being managed by an Assistant or Deputy Fire Chief, under the Fire Chief's direction.

III. In cooperation/negotiation with the City of Hutchinson Fire Department, develop a response system that incorporates a City fire department response to those residential and commercial districts within a 20-minute response time of City Limits.

The HFD can provide a staffed fire engine for immediate response upon dispatch.

- 91% of the County's population live within a 20-minute response time of the HFD.
- 83% of parcels within the County are within a 20-minute response time of the HFD.
- 94% of parcel valuation within the County are within a 20-minute response time of the HFD.

This first response capability would not replace the response from the fire district but rather provide a fast initial response, establishment of command, and first-in fire suppression efforts. Fire doubles in size every minute, and the ability to attack a fire during its incipient stage is critical to reducing the potential for injury or loss of life to the residents and increasing firefighter and fire ground safety. This service option has the support of the Hutchinson Fire Department Fire Chief and should be a consideration regardless of any outcome of this study.

Fire Districts Respond to the study:

In response to the fire study presented to the commission, the county fire chiefs called their own meeting on May 17, 2021 to have items to present to the county. Present at that meeting were Reno County Fire Districts 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, and Joint 1. Reno County Emergency Management or any other full-time staff was not invited to this meeting.

The county fire chiefs requested a meeting with the Emergency Management Director, County Administrator, and Commissioner Friesen to discuss. This meeting was held on May 20, 2021. At that meeting, the county chiefs presented and agreed to do the following: (Attachment I)

Share and adopt a common baseline set of Standard Operational Guidelines (SOGs)

- a. Those who have SOGs will share them, they will be reviewed, changed and implemented county wide.
 - b. Lexipool Public Safety Policy & Training Solutions was discussed as a possible option. This is currently being used by multiple Fire Departments and Law Enforcement agencies in the county,
 - c. VFIS, the insurance provider for all fire districts, also has a set of SOGs that can be modified and adopted by the county. This option will be explored as well.
 - d. Implementation: this drafting and training on policies can start immediately; however, to implement these into everyday practice will take some time, it will not happen overnight.
2. Radio Transmissions
- a. Use Active911 to see how many firefighters you have going to the call for service. Once there are enough firefighters responding, tell dispatch your district is responding via radio transmission, so they know you are responding.
 - b. Implementation: This can happen immediately.
3. Turf Kills: Contract between fire districts for automatic aid
- a. Chiefs are willing to invoice and pay for an automatic response from surrounding districts in certain situations.
 - i. The chiefs will send invoices/pay these invoices once at the end of the year.
 - b. Chiefs will start putting together heat maps, so they know days/times they do not have firefighters available.
 - c. County will look at utilizing the mutual aid box alarm system to ensure an effective response force is utilized on each scene.
 - d. Implementation: contracts will need to be explored with the County Counselor. The Computer Aided Dispatching (CAD) system will need to have new response plans built into it.
4. Training: Build a standard training calendar together with the other district chiefs- ensure that each fire station has a computer and internet access so firefighters can train remotely.
- a. Firefighters will need to take the initiative to make time for training.
 - b. Training will be available and convenient for firefighters.

- c. Be sure to train on the basics every year.
 - d. Hold training once a month and allow firefighters to train with other districts.
 - e. Ensure firefighters are trained to a minimum level.
 - f. Be sure the firefighters are qualified to complete the task they are assigned to while on an emergency scene.
 - g. Each district will appoint a training officer. Those training officers will meet monthly to discuss and organize training for the fire districts.
 - h. Implementation: Training officers can be appointed and start meetings during the next 12 months. Training practices will be a focus of the districts starting in June 2022.
5. Bill Paying: ensure chiefs pay their bills on time and will be held accountable for this.
- a. Implementation: Immediately.
6. Each Chief will work with other district chiefs on issues that may arise.
- a. Chiefs will hold a meeting between all district chiefs every month of the year.
 - b. They will use each other as a support group.
 - c. There will be an agenda created for each chiefs' meeting, so the chiefs come prepared to participate.
 - d. Implementation: this will start June 2021.
7. Infrastructure and Equipment
- a. Coordinate with other districts to standardize capital improvement plans.
 - b. Work with the county to create a fire district purchasing policy.
 - c. Create a standardized capital improvement request form.
 - d. Work together on station designs keeping in mind the cancer initiatives.
 - e. Implementation: this will have to be a stair step approach; it will take some time for the districts with less funding to meet infrastructure and equipment requirements. This will be a focus of June 2022-2023.
8. Position Description
- a. Work together to ensure each chief is meeting the requirements of the position description.
 - b. Implementation: Immediately
9. Quarterly meetings with County Administrator:
- a. The County Administrator agreed to meet with the county chiefs at their meeting once a quarter.

Implementation: Immediately.

Following the study and meetings with the fire chiefs, 12 months later, the chiefs had not completed/implemented *any* of tasks they agreed to.

On June 8, 2021, the Board of County Commissioners were presented with the following options:

- 1) Hire a full-time fire service professional to create, adopt, and implement a strategic plan.

- 2) Hire a full-time fire chief and consolidate all county fire districts into one district.
- 3) Maintain current organizational structure.

At that meeting, the hiring of a full-time fire service professional was approved. It was also discussed to not call that person the “chief” of the districts due to a negative connotation that may take on.

- In addition to the position description, some short-Term Fire Administrator goals include:
 1. Create a strategic plan.
 - a. Set priorities to a new consolidated district to meet the County’s fire service needs.
 - b. Determine additional resources that may be needed.
 - c. Ensure that all districts and volunteers are working towards a common goal.
 - i. Training
 - ii. Infrastructure/equipment needs.
 - iii. Effective response force
 - iv. Promote up-to-date consistent best practices for the fire service.
 - v. SAFETY
 2. Implement county-wide emergent and non-emergent Standard Operating Guidelines
 3. Accountability
 - a. Hold existing chiefs accountable to their position description.
 - b. Establish training standards for Chief Officers with up-to-date industry best practices.
 4. Work with each fire district and create heat maps to know when/where the volunteer workforce is available.
- Long term Fire Administrator goals:
 1. Implement all elements of strategic plan.
 2. Consolidation of fire resources
 - a. While this may be met with some stiff resistance, this will be the only way to achieve the level of training and consistent that Reno County residents expect from the fire service. If it is done correctly, it can improve service while reducing liability exposures.
- What can Emergency Management do now with operational authority and support from the BOCC?
 1. When the grassland fire danger is very high or extreme, the jurisdiction having authority *and* the two closest adjoining districts respond to any brush fires to attempt to get them taken care of before it becomes a large event.
 2. Organize all out of county mutual aid requests.

- a. Have dispatch call EM to pull resources from certain fire districts instead of the fire district sending all their firefighters and apparatus, leaving their jurisdiction unprotected.
3. Limitation: With the current staffing levels, Emergency Management does not have the personnel to be able to monitor every call that the fire service goes to. On very high, extreme, or catastrophic fire danger days, we try to preplan incidents and respond to the scene when 3 or more jurisdictions are requested.

Reno County Resolution 2022-08 (Attachment II) was signed and implemented in February of 2022. In part, this allowed the County Administrator to delegate administrative oversight of the Fire Chiefs to the County Emergency Management Director and the County Fire Administrator as the County Administrator sees fit. This also granted the Reno County Emergency Management Director or his/her designee authority on scene in any county fire district.

In March of 2022, Travis Vogt was hired to be the County Fire Administrator. He immediately began working on the priorities to meet the County's consolidated fire service needs. At this time, the chiefs still had not completed any of the tasks they agreed to. Travis began working towards, completing, and implementing the following goals:

1. Determine additional resources that may be needed- the need for firefighting UTVs was identified, approved by the BOCC, purchased, and put in service.
2. Training- implemented a training plan for the county and began having quarterly training with the fire districts. This has improved the overall skill level of firefighters and increases their ability to work together seamlessly, especially in joint operations.
3. Infrastructure/equipment needs-
 - a. infrastructure in two districts (D3 and D7) need immediate attention. Their stations are too small and run down to the point where it impacts operations. D7 (Turon) has purchased land and has drawings for a new station. D3 (Nickerson) will build on the same property as their current fire station. They will need a station similar to what is built on D7.
 - b. Equipment- there are several pieces of equipment that need updated or replaced. However, the budget constraints prevent those items from being replaced in a timely manner. The equipment being purchased now is multi-purpose and similar to what is used across the county. The goal is to purchase like equipment, so every county firefighter knows how to operate the equipment effectively.
 - c. Personal protective equipment was severely lacking in some of the districts. Each fire district was required to purchase wildland gear for their firefighters and structural gear that would meet NFPA standards. This was met with some resistance and had impacts on the special equipment funds of the districts who did not prioritize the purchase of this safety gear.
 - d. Economies of Scale: Purchasing equipment, supplies, and services in bulk has been more cost effective than doing so for each individual district.

4. Effective response force- there is now the appropriate number of firefighters on scene at every fire call for service.
5. Promote up-to-date consistent best practices for the fire service. This is done through information passed along at the monthly Chiefs' Meetings and quarterly trainings.
6. Safety- this has been a big change for the fire districts and has also been met with some resistance. Every firefighter in the county knows they are expected to wear their safety gear while on scene.
7. Develop and implement county-wide emergency and non-emergent Standard Operating Guidelines. Utilizing ARPA funding, the fire districts will have Lexipol Policies later in 2023, or early in 2024. These policies will ensure that each fire district is operating under the same set of policies, increasing the safety of each responder.
8. Accountability- Each chief is accountable to their position description. Those chiefs who did not meet their position description and refused to make changes are no longer employed by Reno County. Each chief has a yearly evaluation and knows what is expected of them.
9. Work with each fire district to know when/where the volunteer workforce is available. Each chief has done a good job of communicating the availability of their firefighters.

As we begin to look at long term goals, the first step will be the consolidation of fire resources. While this may be met with some resistance, this can improve service while reducing liability exposures.

II. Currently:

The rural areas of Reno County are served by 8 fire districts, overseen by the Emergency Management Office. The Reno County Board of Commission is the governing board (“fire board”) for all these fire districts. In addition to the fire related call types, the fire districts also respond to cardiac-respiratory arrest, drownings, electrocutions, and when requested by Emergency Medical Services (EMS) or Law Enforcement.

Each volunteer fire district has a Chief and Assistant Chief and several volunteers. The yearly salary for each fire chief is \$6,000 and the assist chief’s salary is \$3,000. Each firefighter is paid a \$12.50 nominal expense reimbursement and \$12.50 stipend for each emergency they are dispatched and respond to. They are paid a \$25.00 stipend for each training session they attend. These reimbursements and stipends are repeated every 2 hours of an emergency call or training, capping out at \$100.00 for each firefighter, per call, per day.

Fire District 3: Has two Fire stations, one in the city of the Highlands and one fire station in the city of Nickerson. This fire district has approximately 30 volunteers. Hutchinson Fire Department provides mutual aid on all entrapment/extraction calls. District 3 runs on approximately 120 calls for service each year.

Fire District 4: Has four fire stations, one in the city of Arlington, one in the city of Abbyville, one in the city of Partridge, and one in the city of Plevna. This fire district has approximately 30 volunteers. District 4 runs on approximately 125 calls for service each year.

Fire District 6: Has one fire station located in the city of Sylvania. This fire district has approximately 14 volunteers. District 6 runs on approximately 40 calls for service each year.

Fire District 7: Has one fire station located in the city of Turon. This fire district has approximately 14 volunteers. District 7 runs on approximately 40 calls for service each year.

Fire District 8: Has two fire stations, one in the Yoder area, and one in the Pleasant View area. This fire district has approximately 25 volunteers. Hutchinson Fire Department, District 9, or South Hutchinson Fire Department provide mutual aid for all entrapment/extrication calls. District 8 runs on approximately 130 calls for service each year.

Fire District 9: has two fire stations, one located in the city of Haven, and one located in the St. Joe area. This fire district has approximately 15 volunteers. District 9 runs on approximately 85 calls for service each year.

Reno/Kingman Joint Fire District 1: Has one fire station located in Pretty Prairie. This fire district has approximately 25 volunteers. Reno/Kingman Joint Fire District 1 runs on approximately 80 calls for service each year.

Reno/Harvey Joint Fire District 2: Has one fire station located in Buhler. This district has approximately 25 volunteers. The Hutchinson Fire Department provides mutual aid for all entrapment/extrication calls. Reno/Harvey Joint Fire District 2 runs on approximately 100 calls for service each year.

There is an automatic aid agreement for water tenders for all structure fires in the rural parts of the county. If there was a structure fire, on first alarm, the district having jurisdiction and two closest districts will be paged simultaneously.

There is a mutual aid agreement in place with all the fire districts. This is often used when there is a large fire or the district having jurisdiction does not have enough manpower. On days where there is a high grass land fire danger index, if there is a brush fire, on first alarm, the district having jurisdiction and the two closest districts will be paged simultaneously. This was implemented in 2021 and has played dividends to the county's brush fire responses.

Throughout the county, the Hutchinson Fire Department is the only organization that has a technical rescue team, swift water rescue team, and hazmat response team. They will respond via mutual aid when requested to respond to those call(s).

III. Structure and Mil Levees:

The fire districts' structure has been in place for several years, servicing over 1,000 square miles. Through the years, there have been thousands of calls that the fire districts have responded to, saved lives, and property. There is a sense of service across all the districts; the firefighters provide a service to the community, risking their lives for very minimal compensation.

To have an effective response force for a structure fire, we would need approximately 16 firefighters on shift at one time. Having a county wide structure fire response force would not make sense. You would have to have several staffed stations across the county to make that work.

Currently each district has their own mil levee. The districts' special equipment funds where they purchase capital items is not a funded line item for the districts. Any budgeted finds the fire districts do not spend during the year rolls into their equipment fund. The districts save money in their equipment fund to try to replace vehicles and large equipment they are unable to budget for. The districts have saved money by replacing smaller items, extending the use of their vehicles well past their useful life or building firefighting equipment themselves. Consequently, there is a significant amount of equipment in the county that does not meet NFPA regulations. With the increase in the cost of supplies, utilities, insurance, personal protective equipment, etc. without budget increases, in the future, we will be unable to replace vehicles, buildings or equipment. (Attachment III)

Below are the mil levees for each district. *This does not include the districts that have lease purchased equipment or have their station bonded:*

District 3- 5.604 (\$31,733 per mil)

District 4- 6.271 (\$35,708 per mil)

District 6- 13.704 (\$7,560 per mil)

District 7- 8.333 (\$12,061 per mil)

District 8- 5.444 (\$26,264 per mil)

District 9- 5.035 (\$35,408 per mil)

Joint 1- 6.007 (\$23,666 per mil)

Joint 2- 5.746 (\$27,883 per mil)

Total county budget is \$1,460,190—On a \$100,000 house, 1 mil cost a tax payer \$11.50 per year.

1 mil in the county produces \$200,283. For a flat mil levee, if we created one county wide district, using the 2023 budget, it would cost the taxpayers 7.29 mils. For 2024, we do expect fire district budgets to increase due to turnout gear and radio purchases. We will also need to take a hard look at the capital expenditures such as replacing apparatus and fire stations to determine the best course of action.

For comparison purposes only, District 2 is currently at 22.9 mils and each mil produces \$98,980. Total Budget \$2,266,642 approximately 21.3% of Hutchinson Fire's total \$10,618,690 budget.

IV. Options:

- 1. Full time operations level chief and paid part time staff on high fire danger days:** 1 operations level chief and 4,000 hours (2 FFs per district for approximately 31 days each). The operations level chief would need a command vehicle, all other equipment would be maintained by the fire districts. Total of 8.29 mils for personnel only. We would request an additional .5 mil to assist with the purchase of command vehicles and future capital fire department purchases. The total would be somewhere around 8-9 miles. \$1,602,312-\$1,802,601
- 2. Part time paid department, operating out of current fire station, 5 days per week, 8-hour days:** 1 shift with 4 firefighters and an operations level chief- 2.12 mils, not including equipment. Total of 9.41 mils for personnel only. An additional 2 mils (ongoing) to purchase equipment and keep up with capital expenditures. The total would be somewhere around 11-12 mils. \$2,203,179-\$2,403,468
- 3. Full time fire department with one station- 7 days per week 12-hour days:** 2 shifts with 4 firefighters per shift- a total of 8 firefighters and 1 operations level chief- 3.74 mils, not including equipment. Total of 11.03 mils for personnel only. An additional 10 mils to purchase equipment and a station will be necessary, we will also need to add funding for future capital expenses, putting the total somewhere around 21-23 mils. \$4,206,069-\$4,606,647
- 4. Full time fire department with one station 24/7:** 3 shifts with 4 firefighters per shift- a total of 12 firefighters and 1 operations level chief-5.35 mils not including equipment. Total of 12.64 mils for personnel only. An additional 10 mils to purchase equipment and station will be necessary, we will also need to add funding for future capital expenses, putting the total somewhere around 23-25 mils. \$4,606,647-\$5,007,225
- 5. Status Quo:** Keep the districts separate and maintain operations.

Under each of these options, an administrative organization “Reno County Fire” should be established under (or within) the Emergency Management Office. The current organizational structure of the Emergency Management Office nor the Fire Districts will change. The firefighters and assistant chiefs will be the responsibility of the chief who is in charge of operations or management of that area.

These personnel numbers are approximated based on the salary of Hutchinson Fire personnel sent to Helen by the city. These numbers also use a 42% benefits package estimation. Firefighter (marketplace): \$57,037 yearly with 42% for benefits= 80,992 per firefighter. Battalion Chief (minimum): \$71,005 yearly with 42% for benefits= \$100,827.10 per battalion chief.

V. BENEFITS:

When there are no artificial boundaries restricting the fire districts, this will create efficiencies, there will be better services to the community and districts will provide a better service. Under a consolidated system, the closest station(s) with available units will be dispatched to emergencies requiring fire response. Under this concept, multiple districts can be dispatched simultaneously without providing automatic aid reimbursement as required by the current district system we are utilizing. This will increase operational readiness, creating a faster response time and potentially lower Insurance Service Organization (ISO) ratings, saving homeowners and property owners money on insurance.

By combining resources from multiple districts, the newly formed consolidated district can optimize the allocation of equipment, personnel, and funds. This can lead to a more effective and responsive firefighting force.

Enhanced Emergency Response: fewer administrative or perceived barriers and a streamlined command structure can help ensure a faster and more coordinated response in emergencies.

Response, equipment, training, and policies will all be standardized across the districts. This is currently a priority of the Fire Administrator. Having a consolidated district will help with creating a culture of excellence among all the firefighters by creating a professional organized culture, with better-defined roles, clear career paths, and improved opportunities for professional development. Since 2022, when standards started being implemented, we have seen an increase in volunteerism across the county.

One budget will be prepared by the Emergency Management Office while working with the various jurisdictions throughout the county. There will also be one capital improvement plan which could eventually save some taxpayer dollars. When looking at areas to place new equipment, the busiest, and/or most staffed stations will be prioritized. Older equipment will be housed at the slower, and/or less staffed stations. All capital improvement plans will be created with the goal of meeting NFPA equipment requirements in the coming years. Firefighter personal protective equipment will be prioritized throughout the consolidated district. While a merger or consolidation will NOT save on or absorb general funding requests. This will leverage the tax base of the whole county, creating a more stable financial situation, and limit potential large increases among districts, all while increasing the services to the community.

Consolidation is the first step toward future growth and strategic planning and allows for the sharing of equipment across district lines, leading to an increased level of service and safety to the responding firefighters.

Consolidation will assist with apparatus replacement, allowing the usable equipment to be passed on to other departments instead of requiring it to be purchased. Under the current system, the districts operate independently. We do a good job of keeping the equipment inside the county but are constantly looking at the financial impact of the smaller jurisdictions.

This can provide better grant funding opportunities and an increased ability to secure grants from regional, state, and federal agencies, as one district will be better positioned to meet eligibility criteria and demonstrate a broader impact to the entire community.

In this approach, we suggest that each department maintains their identity and some autonomy all while operating as one larger county wide district, becoming more effective and efficient when providing fire protection services to the community. This is not a reduction in force, it may spur more volunteerism and possibly, in the future, create a new career path for part-time or full-time firefighters in the county.

VI. CONSIDERATIONS:

This will not be an easy task to complete. While it is believed all the current County Fire District Chiefs are in support of consolidation, it will never be supported by all of the firefighters or some of the past leadership. When digging into the root of the issues, it is often said that “we have done it this way forever.” Often operating in 1990 tactics because leadership has not made the effort to keep up with current best practices. Giving up some autonomy or power will be a struggle for some who have been part of a department for decades, even if it is the best decision, they are emotionally attached to how things operated several years ago. Change is hard, there will never be an ideal time, there will always be a fear of loss of control, philosophical or cultural differences, and/or changes to a new organization. Change is necessary for growth. It will be necessary that the agencies support the idea of consolidation and put their efforts towards creating a new culture.

Through attrition, there will not be as many chief officers in the county as there are now. This can be worrisome for some districts. Every station will still have someone in charge, but their title may not be “fire chief”, titles are often a big thing in the fire service.

The benefits of consolidation will far outweigh the perceived pitfalls. For long-term sustainability, in rural areas with limited resources, a consolidated fire district will create a more sustainable and resilient firefighting force. Operating as one large organization, we will be better equipped to handle the financial challenges and provide long-term strategic planning.

The ultimate goal is to create a stronger, more staffed, better-equipped fire service that can protect Reno County with increased efficiencies and effectiveness.

VII. Recommendation

I: Support and move forward with Option 1 in 2025 budget cycle: Full time operations level chief and paid part time staff on high fire danger days:

- A.** One (1) operations level chief and 4,000 hours (2 FFs per district for approximately 31 days each). The operations level chief would need a command vehicle, all other equipment would be maintained by the fire districts. Total of 8.29 mils for personnel only. We would request an additional .5 mils to assist with the purchase of command vehicles and future capital fire department purchases. The total would be somewhere around 8-9 mils. \$1,602,312-\$1,802,601
- B.** Provide additional funding for the newly established “Reno County Fire” with a goal of meeting NFPA standards by 2040.
- C.** As the volunteerism in the county starts to decline, start transitioning into options 2-4.
- D.** Support and embrace the changes.



Emergency Management

Reno County
206 W 1st Ave
Hutchinson, KS 67501
620-694-2974

MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

May 24, 2021

SUBJECT: Reno County Fire Chiefs' Strategic Plan Priorities

On May 7, 2021, the Reno County Commissioners held a study session to hear the findings of the county fire study completed by 5Bugle Training and Consulting. At that study session, Commissioner Sellers moved and Commissioner Hirst seconded "that the County Administrator confer with the District Fire Chiefs on ways to implement the recommendations. The County Administrator's initial focus should be the Mandated Improvements outlined in portions of Article 1, paragraph D. on page 9 of the Report".

On May 19, 2021, the Reno County Fire District Chiefs met with the Reno County Administrator, Reno County Emergency Management and Commissioner Friesen to discuss the 5Bugle training and consulting study.

At the start of the meeting, each person present was presented with a copy of the draft meeting minutes from the study session, the Reno County Fire Chief's Position Description, and a page 9 of 5Bugle's report. The Fire Chiefs were encouraged to watch the Commission Study Session online on their own time if they have not done so already. The Chiefs were asked to participate in outlining their ideas to put into a memorandum for record to be presented to the Board of County Commissioners.

The Chiefs stated they called their own meeting on May 17, 2021 to come up with ideas to present to the county. Present at that meeting were Reno County Fire Districts 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, and Joint 1.

Below are several changes and improvements that the county chiefs have agreed to.

1. Share and adopt a common baseline set of Standard Operational Guidelines (SOGs)
 - a. Those who have SOGs will share them, they will be reviewed, changed and implemented county wide.
 - b. Lexipool Public Safety Policy & Training Solutions was discussed as a possible option. This is currently being used by multiple Fire Departments and Law Enforcement agencies in the county,
 - c. VFIS, the insurance provider for all fire districts also have a set of SOGs that can be modified and adopted by the county. This option will be explored as well.
 - d. Implementation: this drafting and training on policies can start immediately; however, to implement these into everyday practice will take some time, it will not happen overnight.

2. Radio Transmissions
 - a. Use Active911 to see how many firefighters you have going to the call for service. Once there are enough firefighters responding, tell dispatch your district is responding via radio transmission, so they know you are responding.
 - b. Implementation: This can happen immediately.
3. Turf Kills: Contract between fire districts for automatic aid
 - a. Chiefs are willing to invoice and pay for an automatic response from surrounding districts on certain situations.
 - i. The chiefs will send invoices/pay these invoices once at the end of the year.
 - b. Chiefs will start putting together heat maps so they know days/times they do not have firefighters available
 - c. County will look at utilizing the mutual aid box alarm system to ensure an effective response force is utilized on each scene.
 - d. Implementation: contracts will need to be explored with the County Counselor. The Computer Aided Dispatching (CAD) system will need to have new response plans built into it.
4. Training: Build a standard training calendar together with the other district chiefs- ensure that each fire station has a computer and internet access so firefighters can train remotely.
 - a. Firefighters will need to take initiative to make time for training.
 - b. Training will be available and convenient to firefighters
 - c. Be sure to train on the basics every year
 - d. Hold training once a month and allow firefighters to train with other districts
 - e. Ensure firefighters are trained to a minimum level
 - f. Be sure they firefighters are qualified to complete the task they are assigned to while on an emergency scene
 - g. Each district will appoint a training officer. Those training officers will meet monthly to discuss and organize training for the fire districts
 - h. Implementation: Training officers can be appointed and start meeting during the next 12 months. Training practices will be a focus of the districts starting in June 2022.
5. Bill Paying: ensure chiefs pay their bills on time and will be held accountable for this.
 - a. Implementation: Immediately.
6. Each Chief will work with other district chiefs on issues that may arise.
 - a. Chiefs will hold a meeting between all district chiefs every month of the year
 - b. They will use each other as a support group
 - c. There will be an agenda created for each chiefs meeting so they chiefs come prepared to participate
 - d. Implementation: this will start June 2021.
7. Infrastructure and Equipment
 - a. Coordinate with other districts to standardize capital improvement plans
 - b. Work with the county to create a fire district purchasing policy

- c. Create a standardized capital improvement request form
 - d. Work together on station designs keeping in mind the cancer initiatives
 - e. Implementation: this will have to be a stair step approach, it will take some time for the districts with less funding to meet infrastructure and equipment requirements. This will be a focus of June 2022-2023.
8. Position Description
- a. Work together to ensure each chief is meeting the requirements of the position description
 - b. Implementation: Immediately
9. Quarterly meetings with County Administrator:
- a. The County Administrator agreed to meet with the county chiefs at their meeting once a quarter.
 - b. Implementation: Immediately.

In addition to the noted changes and improvements the chiefs agreed to, they county has agreed to look at how to complete the following tasks:

1. hold the chiefs accountable.
 - a. An annual review and/or a periodic grade card system for each chief was discussed.
2. Provide purchasing cards for the fire chiefs
3. Talk with county Information Technology Department (IT) to see if computers, software, and Sharepoint access can be provided.
4. Revisit the chiefs pay
 - a. Chiefs pay was last updated by resolution in 2007.
 - b. Chiefs were asked to track hours or determine an alternate method as to what would be fair pay for each chief.

Sincerely,



Adam Weishaar
Director

Attachments:

Board of Reno County Commissioners study session draft minutes May 7, 2021
Reno County Fire Chiefs Position Description
Resolution 2007-12

May 7, 2021
Reno County Courthouse
Hutchinson, Kansas

The Board of Reno County Commissioners held a study session with Chairman Ron Hirst, Commissioner Daniel Friesen and Commissioner Ron Sellers, County Administrator Randy Partington, County Counselor Joe O'Sullivan, and Minutes Clerk Cindy Martin, present. Emergency Management Director Adam Weishaar, Emergency Management Specialist Todd Strain, and Fire Chief Bobby White were also present.

At 8:30 Mr. Hirst opened the session.

County Administrator Randy Partington introduced 5 Bugle Training and Consulting Bruce Fuerbringer, M.S., EFO who made a presentation on the Reno County Fire Districts. He spoke about Kansas Fire Service requirements/standards and mandates. He talked about the responsibilities of the Commission as Fire Board. He reviewed the survey he did and gave thirteen issues and other survey outcomes. He suggested each of the commissioners visit all the rural fire stations and communicate with personnel listening to their issues, agree on common goals, and having the Chiefs buy in.

Fire Chief Bobby White said communication and accountability were important. In his opinion they should have a new fire board or overseer to build trust.

A discussion that took place with respect to whether the Board of County Commissioners could delegate its authority as the Fire Board to another entity or entities. County Counselor Joe O'Sullivan stated that in the 1960's the county Commission had appointed advisory boards for each of the fire districts. Their purpose was to advise the county commission, as the governing body of each Fire District, as to the level of emergency response expected by the constituents in each District. He said the advisory boards had no legal authority, but some acted at times as if they had. They were disbanded in the mid-1980's. He advised that Kansas Statutes provide for the creation of a Board of Trustees for a fire district and further provides that the county commission to delegate some of its authority to the Trustees. He said the county commission had never seriously considered appointed Boards of Trustees to manage the Fire Districts.

The Board asked questions and then spoke about the direction they would like to continue with the information reviewed today. They discussed having staff come up with ideas with clear achievements starting the communications with the Fire Chiefs.

Emergency Management Director Adam Weishaar stated he would start by creating a strategic plan then he asked where the Commission wanted to start on the Fire Districts?

Mr. Sellers moved, seconded by Mr. Hirst, for this Board to accept the findings, evaluation, development study and recommendations of the Five Bugle Training and Consulting Report dated May, 2021 and that the County Administrator confer with the District Fire Chiefs on ways to implement the recommendations. The County Administrator's initial focus should be the Mandated Improvements outlined in portions of Article 1, paragraph D. on page 9 of the Report as follows:

Create and adopt a Strategic Plan to set priorities for meeting the County's fire service needs, focus energy and resources to accomplish each priority, strengthen operations and ensure that the fire chief, his/her chief officers, local officers, firefighters, and other stakeholders are working toward common goals. The strategic plan will help establish mutual agreement on intended outcomes and assess and adjust the organization's direction in response to a changing environment.

The Strategic Plan may include an analysis of current fire district boundaries along with any recommended changes, or the development of practices that ensure compliance with current state statutes that regulate how emergency services can be delivered outside a fire district.

The County Administrator should make his initial report to the Board on June 8, 2021. The motion was approved by a roll call vote of 3-0.

At 11:40 a.m. the meeting adjourned until 9:00 a.m. Tuesday, May 11, 2021.

Approved:

Chair, Board of Reno County Commissioners

(ATTEST)

Reno County Clerk
cm

Date

I. Mandate Improvements That Meet Current Fire Service Best Practices:

- A. The Board of County Commissioners, as the governing authority over the fire districts, create a process in which all of the individual fire district fire chiefs are mandated to improve practices including, but not limited to, the development of common management and operational practices, such as Standard Operating Guidelines (SOG's), budgeting procedures (including a Capital Improvement Plan [CIP]), training practices, officer development and planning efforts. The Board of County Commissioners would hold the chiefs accountable (as they should currently be doing) or provide someone that has the support of the Board with the administrative/ operational authority over the districts to ensure compliance.

Those fire chiefs that refuse to cooperate and comply with the Board's directive are to be relieved of their duties.

- B. Develop or use an established curriculum for a Chief Officer training program. The curriculum should be adapted to Reno County's needs to assist chief officers attain the skills to successfully perform the duties outlined in the fire chief job description.
- C. Create a liaison fire chief position from among the fire district fire chiefs to function as the representative of the fire districts to discuss issues, bring ideas and recommendations or otherwise creatively problem solve with the Board of County Commissioners.
- D. Create and adopt a Strategic Plan to set priorities for meeting the County's fire service needs, focus energy and resources to accomplish each priority, strengthen operations and ensure that the fire chief, his/her chief officers, local officers, firefighters, and other stakeholders are working toward common goals. The strategic plan will help establish mutual agreement on intended outcomes and assess and adjust the organization's direction in response to a changing environment.

The Strategic Plan may include an analysis of current fire district boundaries along with any recommended changes, or the development of practices that ensure compliance with current state statutes that regulate how emergency services can be delivered outside a fire district.

It would also address the state of fire district infrastructure, including a refurbishment and/or replacement schedule and how to innovatively address the needs of fire districts that face fiscal constraints as part of the greater County Fire Department.

II. Consolidate Current Fire Districts into One District with One Fire Chief:

- A. Establish a system that allows individual Townships to retain their identity as a member of the greater fire protection system yet supports centralized management and a collaborative decision-making process that include purchasing policies that are developed based on need and safety benefits.
- B. Allocate budget dollars across current fire district borders to be able to spend monies where the most critical need is, ensuring minimum standards are met throughout the County.

RENO COUNTY POSITION DESCRIPTION

JOB TITLE: Fire Chief - Volunteer Department

Grade: S

Exempt

PCP Level: 4

Position Summary: Under the supervision of the County Administrator, and through the Emergency Management Director, this position is responsible for the proper, professional and efficient operation of the Fire District. Job responsibilities are primarily administrative and supervisory including but not limited to operations, training, safety and education. This is a volunteer position and is customarily responsible for the preparation and response to emergencies.

Essential Functions:

Must supervise, regulate and manage all district activities;

- Ensure all volunteers are properly qualified, protected and trained to respond to any type of fire related emergency;
- Holds volunteers accountable for performance
- Supervise and coordinate hazardous materials responses and preparedness with other departments;
- Draft and present department budget to the Emergency Management Director and County Administrator;
- Make purchasing decisions for invoices totaling \$5,000 or less
- For invoices totaling over \$5,000, develop equipment specifications and submit them to the Emergency Management Director and County Administrator for bid process according to policy and procedures;
- Manages all invoices in a timely manner
- Ensure effective maintenance, repair, improvement and replacement of all firefighting equipment, vehicles and property owned or managed by the District, including managing a capital improvement or replacement program
- Have knowledge and understanding of long term goals and objectives of the department;
- Provide a written report to the Board of County Commissioners when requested and attend meetings as required;
- Address questions, concerns and complaints from the general public
- Work with the Emergency management Director to meet staffing needs including the hiring, discipline and termination of subordinate personnel;
- Submit payroll on a quarterly basis
- Oversee Quality Assurance/Quality Improvement Program for the department;
- Ability to safely operate all vehicles and equipment assigned to any staff member at the station;
- Investigates the causes and circumstances of fires, prepares fire reports and submits them to the appropriate authority
- Processes all insurance claims for property and workman's compensation in a timely manner
- Attend monthly fire Chief's meetings
- Makes recommendations to the Emergency Management Director, County Administrator and/or the Board of County Commissioners to improve the quality and quantity of Rural Fire District Services
- Respond to open records request within 72 hours
- Ensure effective command and control procedures are in place

Marginal Functions

- Other duties as assigned by county administration

Position Qualifications:

- Possess a valid Kansas Driver's License; Non-Commercial Class B preferred
- Eligible to work in the United States
- Reside within the Fire District and Reno County
- Firefighter 1 or equivalent experience

Skills and Abilities

- **Experience:** Five years' experience providing full service public safety functions at an officer's rank and or management equivalent preferred.
- **Accountability:** Employee is responsible for budgetary control of the department and does participate in the annual budget process
- **Supervision:** Supervision and Control of all departmental staff and activities
- **Personal Relations:** Strong interpersonal skills are required. Contact with public, County Departments, other agencies and entities is expected
- **Working Conditions:** This position involves work both indoors and outdoors year round in varying weather and extreme exigent conditions. Ability to wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) (Ear protection, bunker/wildland gear and safety glasses)

Reasonable Accommodation Statement

To perform this job successfully, an individual must be able to perform each essential duty satisfactorily. Reasonable accommodations may be made to enable qualified individuals with disabilities to perform the essential functions and skills.

The duties listed above are intended only as illustrations of the various types of work that may be performed. The omission of specific statements of duties does not exclude them from the position if work is similar, related or a logical assignment of the position. The job description does not constitute an employment agreement between the employer and the employee and is subject to change by the employer as the needs of the employer and requirements of the job change

Printed Volunteer Name _____
Date

Volunteer Signature _____
Date

Reno County Board of Commissioner (or designee) _____
Date

Reno County Board of Commissioner (or designee) _____
Date

Reno County Board of Commissioner (or designee) _____
Date

EOE /Original: Human Resources Department Copy: Employee/Department Director

JOB DESCRIPTION WORKSHEET

Position: Fire Chief - Volunteer Department

Evaluation Date:

RENO COUNTY JOB EVALUATION

Task	Occasionally (1%-33%)	Frequently (34%-66%)	Constantly (67%-100%)
Standing		X	
Walking		X	
Sitting			X
Reclining	X		
Change of Position		X	
Reaching (Extended Hands /Arm)		X	
Reach across Midline		X	
Handling (Hold, Grasp, Seize, Turn)		X	
Fingering (Pinch/Pick)		X	
Feeling (Perceive Attributes of Objects)		X	
Crouching/Squatting (Bend Legs/Spine)		X	
Crawling	X		
Balancing	X		
Stooping (Bend at Waist)		X	
Kneeling		X	
Jumping		X	
Stairs		X	
Scaffolding	X		
Ramp	X		
Pole	-		
In/Out of Machine		X	
Ladder		X	

MACHINE CONTROL OPERATION

Task	Occasionally (1%-33%)	Frequently (34%-66%)	Constantly (67%-100%)
Arm/Hand		X	
Leg/Foot		X	
Simple Grasp (Grasp Lightly)		X	
Firm Grasp(Use Pressure/Force)		X	
Fine Manipulation		X	

In the following graph write in how much weight the individual will be lifting in each category.

Task	Occasionally (1%-33%)	Frequently (34%-66%)	Constantly (67%-100%)
Lifting/Lowering	X up to 100lbs		
Carrying	X up to 100lbs		
Pushing/Pulling (Force Exerted)	X up to 200lbs		

Degree of Strength	Amount of Lifting/ Carrying
<input type="checkbox"/> Very Heavy Work (Level 5)	Exerting in excess of 100 pounds occasionally, and/or in excess of 50 pounds of force frequently, and/or in excess of 20 pounds of force constantly.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Heavy Work (Level 4)	Exerting 50 to 100 pounds occasionally, or 25 to 50 pounds frequently, or 10 to 20 pounds constantly.
<input type="checkbox"/> Medium Work (Level 3)	Exerting 20 to 50 pounds of force occasionally, and/or 10 to 25 pounds of force frequently, and/or greater than negligible up to 10 pounds of force constantly.
<input type="checkbox"/> Light Work (Level 2)	Exerting up to 20 pounds of force occasionally, and/or up to 10 pounds of force frequently.
<input type="checkbox"/> Sedentary Work (Level 1)	Exerting up to 10 pounds of force occasionally, and/or a negligible amount of force frequently.

Determined Work Level: Level 4

Work related tasks & weights/forces associated: We do occasionally receive shipments of equipment and have to unload them with boxes that could weigh as much as 50lbs. Loading and unloading of generators from trailers as well as other equipment that could weigh up to 50lbs.

WORKING CONDITIONS

1. 60% indoors 40% outdoors
2. Emergency situations require irregular schedules, hours, and other unusual conditions including extreme heat or cold, exposure to hazardous chemicals, and severe weather conditions.
3. Surroundings may be noisy.
4. Possible exposure to communicable diseases.

On occasion may be exposed to spills of blood or body fluids

Volunteer Signature

Date

RENO COUNTY RESOLUTION 2022-08

A RESOLUTION RESCINDING AND REPLACING RESOLUTION 2012-40
AND DELEGATING TO THE RENO COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR
AND THE RENO COUNTY EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT DIRECTOR
CERTAIN AUTHORITY OVER RENO COUNTY
FIRE DISTRICTS 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, RENO-KINGMAN JOINT FIRE DISTRICT NO. 1,
AND RENO-HARVEY JOINT FIRE DISTRICT NO. 2

WHEREAS, K.S.A. 19-3601 specifies that the board of county commissioners shall be and constitutes the governing body of each fire district within the county; and

WHEREAS, K.S.A. 19-3601A specifies the authority of the governing body of a fire district, including the authority to “do all things necessary to effectuate the purposes of this Act”; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF RENO COUNTY, KANSAS, ACTING IN ITS CAPACITY AS THE GOVERNING BODY OF RENO COUNTY FIRE DISTRICTS 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, RENO-KINGMAN JOINT FIRE DISTRICT NO. 1, and RENO-HARVEY JOINT FIRE DISTRICT NO. 2, that the following shall be immediately in effect, to wit:

1. The Reno County Administrator shall have the authority to appoint all District Fire Chiefs, including interim District Fire Chiefs, subject to approval by the governing body. The Reno County Administrator shall have the authority to discipline all District Fire Chiefs, including the authority to suspend or terminate their respective appointments to office.
2. In the absence of any Fire District Fire Chief, the County Administrator may name an interim Fire Chief, or name the County Fire Administrator as interim chief, and shall consult and obtain approval from the Board of County Commissioners on a permanent replacement as soon as practicable.
3. All Fire Chiefs, employees and volunteers of the Fire Districts are administratively responsible to the County Administrator. The County Administrator may delegate administrative oversight of the Fire Chiefs to the County Emergency Management Director and the County Fire Administrator as the County Administrator sees fit.
4. The Reno County Emergency Management director or his/her designee shall have authority on scene in any county fire district. This operational authority includes coordination of more than one fire district or with municipalities, ensuring compliance with fire district practices, and making any operational budgetary decisions. Fire Chiefs shall follow any order issued by the Reno Emergency Management director or designee during such emergency.

5. The County Administrator is hereby authorized to permit other municipalities to perform fire mitigation operations within any fire district in the County. Any fire mitigation operations which require county reimbursement shall be presented to the County Commission for approval.

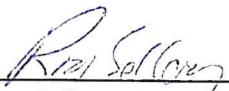
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this Resolution shall be effective from and after its adoption.

ADOPTED in regular session this 22nd day of February, 2022.

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
OF RENO COUNTY, KANSAS ACTING AS
THE GOVERNING BODY OF RENO COUNTY
FIRE DISTRICTS NO. 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9,
RENO-KINGMAN JOINT FIRE DISTRICT NO. 1 and
RENO-HARVEY JOINT FIRE DISTRICT NO. 2



Daniel Friesen, Chair



Ron Sellers, Commissioner



Ron Hirst, Commissioner

ATTEST:



Donna Patton, Reno County Clerk

RESOLUTION NO. 2007- 12

A RESOLUTION AMENDING RESOLUTION 2005-24, A RESOLUTION WHICH ESTABLISHED STIPENDS FOR DISTRICT FIRE CHIEFS AND PROVIDING FOR THE APPOINTMENT AND COMPENSATION OF ASSISTANT FIRE CHIEFS

WHEREAS, the Board of County Commissioners, acting as the Governing Body of Reno County Fire Districts, adopted Resolution 2005-24, which established stipends to be paid District Fire Chiefs; and

WHEREAS, subsequent to the adoption of said Resolution, Reno County Fire District No. 9 has been established, and Resolution 2005-24 needs to be amended to establish the annual stipend to be paid to the District Chief of Fire District No. 9.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF RENO COUNTY, KANSAS that:

1. The following annual stipends are reaffirmed or established to be effective on January 1, 2007, payable on a monthly basis:

<u>Fire Districts</u>	<u>Fire Chief Salary</u>
Fire District #3	\$4,000
Fire District #4	\$4,000
Fire District #6	\$3,000
Fire District #7	\$3,250
Fire District #8	\$3,250
Fire District #9	\$3,250
Reno/Kingman Joint #1	\$3,500

2. Assistant Fire Chiefs shall be limited to one per Fire District unless a District has more than one fire station, in which case the limit shall be two Assistant Fire Chiefs.
3. It shall be the responsibility of each Fire Chief to appoint an Assistant Fire Chief and to set the annual stipend payable on a monthly basis for each Assistant Fire Chief. No Assistant Fire Chief shall be paid more than one-half of the stipend paid to the Fire Chief, and such stipend shall relate to the requirements of the Assistant Fire Chief's responsibilities. Any change in stipend shall be effective on the first day of the month following the Fire Chief's written notice to the Reno County Board of County Commissioners.
4. The appointment of Assistant Fire Chiefs and the annual stipend paid to each are subject to the review and approval of the Board of County Commissioners.

ADOPTED in regular session this _____ day of May, 2007.

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
OF RENO COUNTY, KANSAS



Frances J. Garcia, Chairperson

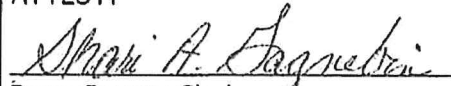


Larry R. Sharp, Member



Francis E. Schoepf, Member

ATTEST:



Reno County Clerk

Unit type and number, equipment	Model year	Planned year to replace	Estimated Replacement Cost	Cost per year	Service life
Brush 392	2022	2032	130000	13000	10 years
Engine 383	1997	2023	375000	18750	20 years
Engine 384	2001	2026	375000	18750	20 years
Brush 394	2004	2029	130000	13000	10 years
Brush 395	2008	2033	130000	13000	10 years
Tender 390	2009	2034	275000	11000	25 years
Brush 393	2013	2038	130000	13000	10 years
Command 360	2020	2045	50000	3333.33	15 years
SCBA (12 Total, 6 at a time)		2021/2028	60000	3000	2023 purchased 6
New Nickerson Station		2024	450000	11250	40 years
UTV	2023	2038	35000	2333.33	15 years
				0	
				0	

total required set back per year 120416.67

Special Equipment Rollover

2011	60000
2012	46000
2013	65000
2014	55000
2015	85000
2016	70000
2017	80000
2018	95000
2019	84000
2020	88000
2021	93000
2022	98000
Average Rollover	76583.33

Average Yearly Deficit -43833.33

Unit type and number, equipment	Model year	Planned year to replace	Estimated Replacement Cost	Cost per year	Service Life	
Brush 694	1996	2027	130000	13000	10 Years	
Brush 695	1985	2026	130000	13000	10 Years	
Tender 690	1982	2024	275000	11000	25 Years	
Engine 682 (Rice Co)	2000	2028	350000	17500	20 Years	
Brush 686	1979	2029	150000	15000	10 Years	
Brush 687 (new)	1991	2027	130000	13000	10 years	
bunker gear		2031	30000	1200		removed from CIP to general fund
airpacks		2029	200000	8000	25 years	
building renovation		2030	100000	4000	25 years	
air bottles		2023	21000	1050	20 years	
				0		
				0		
				0		
				0		
total required set back per year				96750		

Special Equipment Rollover

2011	3700
2012	0
2013	15000
2014	10000
2015	9000
2016	9000
2017	23000
2018	26000
2019	22000
2020	28000
2021	0
2022	6000

Unit type and number, equipment	Model year	Planned year to replace	Estimated Replacement Cost	Cost per year	Service Life
Engine 781	1989	2025	350000	17500	20 years
Brush 793	1985	2024	130000	13000	10 years
Brush 794	1999	2024	130000	13000	10 years
Brush 795	2001	2024	130000	13000	10 years
Brush 787	1984	2025	150000	15000	10 years
786	1969	2023	0	0	
Tender 790	1992	2026	275000	11000	25 years
bunker gear		2030	100000	0	removed from CIP to general fund
airpacks		2039	200000	8000	25 years
building construction		2024	400000	10000	40 years
land		2023	5000	0	
				0	
				0	
				0	
				0	
				0	
total required set back per year				100500	

Special Equipment Rollover	
2011	36755
2012	24000
2013	20000
2014	20000
2015	27000
2016	30000
2017	30000
2018	32000
2019	34000

Unit type and number, equipment	Model year	Planned year to replace	Estimated Replacement Cost	Cost per year	Service Life
Engine 881	1991	2026	350000	17500	20 years
Engine 882	1991	2026	350000	17500	20 years
Tender 890	2000	2028	275000	11000	25 years
Tender 891	2000	2028	275000	11000	25 years
Brush 892	2010	2035	100000	10000	10 years
Brush 893	2001	2023	130000	13000	10 years
Brush 894	1985	2023	0	0	Not added on clear gov--Reserve truck
Brush 895	2018	2043	30000	3000	10 years
bunker gear		2030	100000	0	removed from CIP to general fund
airpacks		2039	100000	4000	25 years
building renovation		2022	100000	4000	25 years
				0	
				0	
				0	
				0	
				0	
				0	
total required set back per year				91000	

Special Equipment Rollover	
2011	42500
2012	9000
2013	30000
2014	8000
2015	30000
2016	50000
2017	40000
2018	44000

Unit type and number	Model year	Planned year to replace	Estimated Replacement Cost	Cost per year	Service Life	
Engine 982	1995	2027	350000	17500	20 years	not in clear gov
Engine 983	1994	2023	350000	17500	20 years	
Tender 990	2016	2041	300000	12000	25 years	
Brush 991	1999	2025	130000	13000	10 years	
Brush 995 (NEW)	2021	2046	130000	13000	10 years	
Brush 993 (NEW)	2021	2046	130000	13000	10 years	
Brush 994 (6x6)	1990	2033	110000	7333.333333	15 years	
Engine bunker gear	PP 982	1995	350000	17500	20 years	
airpacks		2032	100000	0		removed from CIP to general fund
cascade system	2023	2037	200000	8000	25 years	
		2048	100000	4000	25 years	
total required set back per year				122833.33		

Special Equipment Rollover

2011	70000
2012	22046
2013	70000
2014	70000
2015	75000
2016	95000
2017	108900
2018	105000
2019	102000
2020	105000
2021	78000
2022	78000
Average rollover	81578.83

Unit type and number, equipment	Model year	Planned year to replace	Estimated Replacement Cost	Cost per year	Service Life	
B192	2002	2026	130000	13000	10 Years	Possibly get new chassis and extend life
B193	2001	2027	130000	13000	10 Years	
B195	2008	2030	130000	13000	10 Years	
B184	1989	2025	150000	10000	15 Years	
B185	2006	2031	150000	10000	15 Years	
T190	2006	2032	275000	11000	25 Years	
E182	2020	2045	350000	14000	25 Years	
R1	2005	2035	100000	5000	20 Years	
C160	2022	2037	60000	4000	15 Years	
airpacks		2029	100000	4000	25 Years	
bldg maintain			100000	4000	25 Years	
bunker gear			30000	0		removed from CIP to general fund
				0		
				0		
total required set back per year				101000		

Special Equipment Rollover

2011	29450
2012	29000
2013	20000
2014	20000
2015	45000
2016	45000
2017	60000
2018	60000
2019	51000
2020	75000
2021	69000
2022	64000
Average rollover	47287.5

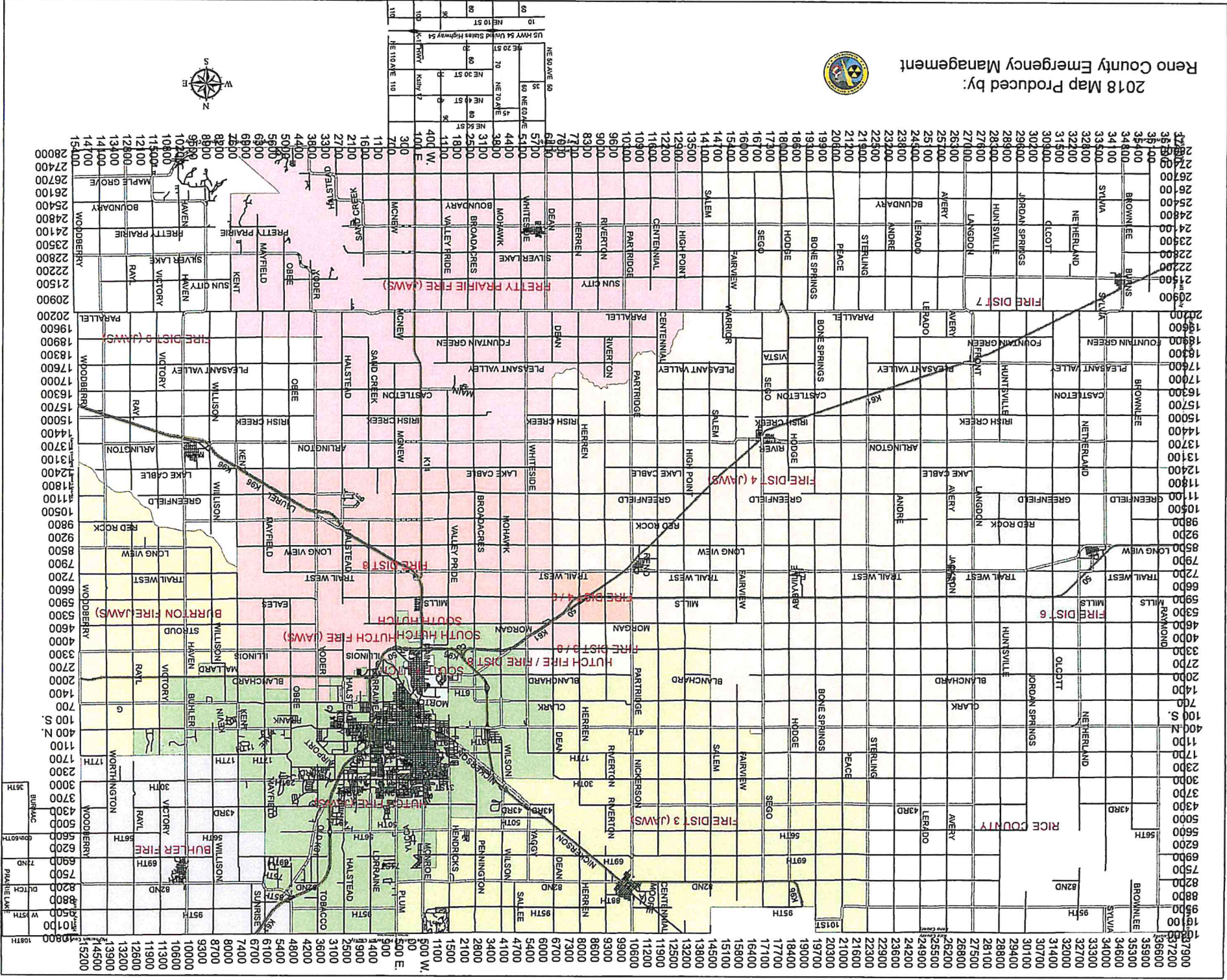
Average Yearly Deficit -53712.5

Unit type and number, equipment	Model year	Planned year to replace	Estimated Replacement Cost	Cost per year	Service Life	
Engine 581	2001	2026	350000	17500	20 years	
Tender 590	2024	2049	275000	11000	25 years	
Large Brush 587	1986	2035	140000	9333.33	15 years	
Brush 592	2002	2027	130000	13000	10 years	
Brush 593	2005	2030	130000	13000	10 years	
Brush 594	1999	2022	130000	13000	10 years	
Command 560	2006	2031	60000	4000	15 years	
Bunker Gear- 12 sets	2009	2022	44400	0		removed from CIP to general fund
Bunker Gear- 7 sets	2015	2025	25900	0		removed from CIP to general fund
Wild Land Gear- 22 sets	2017	2027	19800	0		removed from CIP to general fund
airpacks- bottles	2023	248	25300	1012	25 years	
UTV	2023	2038	35000	2333.33	15 years	
				0		
				0		
				0		
				0		
total required set back per year				84178.67		

Special Equipment Rollover

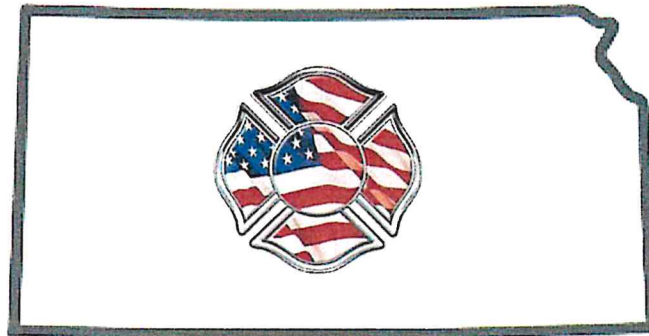
2012	47000
2013	55000
2014	60000
2015	60000
2016	50000
2017	70000
2018	76000
2019	46000
2020	80000
2021	83000
2022	17000
Average Rollover	58545.45

Average Yearly Deficit -25633.21



Street Name	Address Range
US HWY 54	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 50 AVE	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 48 AVE	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 46 AVE	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 44 AVE	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 42 AVE	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 40 AVE	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 38 AVE	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 36 AVE	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 34 AVE	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 32 AVE	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 30 AVE	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 28 AVE	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 26 AVE	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 24 AVE	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 22 AVE	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 20 AVE	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 18 AVE	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 16 AVE	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 14 AVE	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 12 AVE	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 10 AVE	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 8 AVE	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 6 AVE	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 4 AVE	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 2 AVE	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 100 E	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 90 E	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 80 E	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 70 E	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 60 E	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 50 E	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 40 E	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 30 E	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 20 E	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 10 E	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 100 W	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 90 W	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 80 W	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 70 W	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 60 W	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 50 W	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 40 W	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 30 W	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 20 W	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 10 W	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 100 S	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 90 S	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 80 S	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 70 S	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 60 S	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 50 S	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 40 S	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 30 S	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 20 S	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 10 S	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 100 N	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 90 N	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 80 N	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 70 N	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 60 N	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 50 N	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 40 N	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 30 N	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 20 N	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 10 N	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 100 W	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 90 W	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 80 W	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 70 W	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 60 W	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 50 W	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 40 W	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 30 W	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 20 W	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 10 W	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 100 S	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 90 S	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 80 S	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 70 S	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 60 S	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 50 S	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 40 S	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 30 S	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 20 S	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 10 S	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 100 N	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 90 N	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 80 N	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 70 N	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 60 N	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 50 N	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 40 N	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 30 N	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 20 N	1000 S. to 1000 N.
NE 10 N	1000 S. to 1000 N.

Reno County, Kansas



Fire Service Survey, Evaluation and Development Study and Recommendations

May 2021



Five Bugle Training & Consulting, LLC
Bruce A. Fuerbringer, M.S., EFO
W6095 Rock Creek Road
Mondovi, WI 54755
715-577-8944
www.5bugle.net

Executive Summary

Reno County has a long-established system of fire districts to respond to fire and other emergencies. While the fire districts provide initial response to hazardous materials and technical rescue incidents, all rely on Hutchinson Fire for these special response needs. Each fire district is an entity to itself with the Board of County Commissioners as the Fire Board for the fire districts, is the governing body of each fire district within the county by state law. The County also provides limited administrative services such as processing and paying invoices. The current system and management practices on the part of all parties, lends itself to inherent challenges in the areas of administration, operations, training, and strategic planning. The County has been attempting to address and overcome a number of challenges related to fire district response and management practices since the 1990's. The continued presence and concerns regarding these issues is what prompted the County to request this study.

The Nation's fire service is guided by national standards, the Code of Federal Regulations, individual state's laws, and industry best practices relating to all aspects of fire department management and operations. Service standards vary nationwide, based on which regulations and standards have been adopted by reference by either or both the state and local governing bodies. Examples of these standards and regulations are those promulgated by the National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA), the U.S. Fire Administration, the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OSHA). Fire Service best practices may be based on the International Fire Service Training Association (IFSTA), the Maryland Fire and Rescue Institute (MFRI), the National Fire Academy (NFA). Many fire service departments and organizations have developed their own 'best practices' based on these resources in key areas such as emergency response, training, public education and maintenance as well as the business and fiscal responsibilities required to efficiently and effectively manage their organizations.

Unfortunately, many 'best practices' are known only to the organizations that have created and implemented these actions. The way for fire departments to practice continuous improvement is through the sharing of these best practices through networking with and through other fire service professional organizations, leadership professional development opportunities, and ongoing communications in these areas.

A written survey to the fire chiefs, followed by a site visit was conducted in June 2020 to evaluate current fire district management and operational response practices, and to compare current conditions to historical records and situational accounts. The survey and site visit uncovered a significant discrepancy between the fire districts in the perspectives of the fire chiefs, management practices, financial situations and practices, adherence to national incident command and on-scene management practices and a vision for what emergency fire response is and could/should be for Reno County.

In about half of the cases, the fire chief was content with the overall situation, while the other half would like to see greater cooperation and increased professional practices in the areas of management, response practices and training. Those fire districts with more favorable financial resources demonstrated greater overall contentment than those without the fiscal ability to improve their fire district's situation. It is a bit of a case of the "haves" versus the "have-nots," without consideration of the needs of the County and its citizens as a whole. Where there is most likely the expectation on the part of the citizen (or visitor) for similar levels of service no matter where they are in the County, there is, in fact, a significant difference in service levels.

Where service levels are better, the fire districts have an organized and disciplined approach to management, training, and response practices. Where service levels are lacking in comparison, the fire districts have a more laissez faire attitude where they do not wish to be held to any level of accountability. The preference appears to be a 'management by crisis' approach. At the same time, they seek the support of the County to approve their expenditures and of their fellow fire districts to respond additional resources when their own are insufficient (for any number of reasons).

In general, the research for this report found a significant void in the presence and use of written fire service 'Standard Operating Procedures' that address management practices, fireground operations and firefighter health and safety. There are few formal training structures present in the fire districts, and much of the apparatus would be hard pressed to meet current national safety standards. Interviews with various chief officers throughout the fire districts showed a mix of professional attitudes. Some were content with how their system operates in spite of acknowledged deficiencies present, while others expressed frustration with the lack of the appropriate use of operational practices such as the Incident Command System (ICS) and are frustrated by response practices that rely on other fire districts to shore up deficiencies that are not being addressed. In some cases, fire districts will not allow their firefighters to respond in a mutual aid situation without the oversight of one of their own officers to ensure the safety of their firefighters.

The body of this report outlines how conditions do not appear to have changed much over the past three decades, with precious little change occurring to meet modern fire service practices. Where there has been an adoption of industry practices, such as the use of the ICS system for on-scene resource management and command, its use in many cases is marginal – only to the extent that it can be claimed as being used. Significant resistance to any change that would cause some fire chiefs to adopt industry best practices was obvious during the site visit interviews.

The Board of County Commissioners, as the Fire Board for the fire districts, is the governing body of each fire district has the authority to mandate specific practices, and the ability to hire and discharge fire chiefs. It appears that personal relationships between the parties involved, politics, and the unwillingness to commit to consensus-based decisions (such as meeting the requirements of fire chief job description), continues to paralyze efforts to develop professionalism within the County's fire districts, and the resulting improvement in services.

If the County is to overcome the lack of inertia on the part of the fire chiefs themselves to work towards an improved overall fire response system within the County, then the Board of County Commissioners needs to decide if it will step up and take responsibility for service quality or determine if it and its citizens are content with the current system and service levels. Part of the challenge is that the County has never known anything better, so it has little to compare to besides the full-time or paid-on-call departments within the County, and that it has not made the attempt to do so until this study.

If the Board of County Commissioners finds the current system acceptable and one that provides the preferred level of service to its citizens, then it needs to take an official stand stating so. If it feels that things can, and need to be done better, then it needs to take an official stand stating so and implement practices to ensure the improvements occur in a standardized, consistent manner. This should include the strategic planning process and the commitment of the fire chiefs to participate in all aspects, including the implementation of the resulting strategic goals. Either way, the County needs to bring an end to the controversy surrounding the fire district system and choose either the status-quo or support an effort to bring about change with the goal of improved services.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Executive Summary.....	i
Table of Contents.....	iii
Section:	
I: Purpose.....	1
II. Concerns Prompting the Study.....	1
III. Methodology.....	1
IV. Kansas State Statutes Regarding Fire Service.....	2
V. Observations.....	2
VI. Analysis.....	4
VII. Historical Relevance.....	8
VIII. Recommendations.....	8
IV. Public Education.....	13
X: Closing Comments.....	13
<u>Attachments:</u>	
I. 1986 Fire District Letter.....	12
II. 1999 Memos.....	14
III. Kansas Fire Reporting Requirements.....	20
IV. K.S.A. 19-3601; Fire Districts.....	22
V. Parcel Location, Valuation Protected, Travel Times.....	23

Note: Attachments may be WORD converted PDF files, and as such may not have the same appearance as the original document. Original documents are available for inspection to substantiate authenticity.

Section I: Purpose

Reno County, Kansas seeks to have an evaluation of its long-established system of fire districts and its effectiveness in responding to fire and other emergencies. This study's purpose is to identify current strengths and weaknesses and develop recommendation for how improved and more consistent response and performance levels might be achieved.

Section II: Concerns Prompting the Study

Concerns prompting this study include a perceived lack of training, staffing and response capabilities. It was reported that there were times when some fire districts were either unable to provide an adequate response to emergency situations (an "adequate" response being defined as the ability to provide sufficient personnel and equipment on-scene to positively impact life-safety, incident stabilization and property conservation) or lack the ability to respond any personnel whatsoever. In the latter case, after a fire district has been paged to respond 3 consecutive times and there has been no response by the fire district, the next closest district to the emergency is dispatched. This has reportedly occurred on numerous occasions over the years. Other concerns include needed infrastructure updates, including several fire stations. The desire is to 'fix' the system first and then allow the system to work on resolving the problems and concerns in a manner that encourages cooperation and planning on the part of the fire districts.

It is understood that the state of facilities, equipment, training, and staffing have a significant impact on the ability to accomplish an adequate response, and that the ability to attract and retain volunteer firefighters is the foundation for all of this. Recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters is impacted by the perceived professional environment that the recruit can anticipate working in. A professional environment is defined as adequate facilities, equipment, training, and a management style that promotes professional growth and provides challenges that are attractive to firefighters.

Section III: Methodology

Information gathering techniques included discussions with emergency management officials, the Reno County Counselor and the Kansas State Fire Marshall, interviews with all of the fire chiefs, a written survey sent to each fire district and on-site observations as well as the opportunity to witness several emergency responses all contributed to the report.

Section IV: Kansas State Statutes Regulating Fire Departments

Several of the fire chiefs expressed a frustration at the limitations that were attempted to be placed on their fire districts, particularly where automatic aid is concerned, with the expressed limitations being accredited to state statute that requires comparable reciprocity. These chiefs believe that the limitations being placed upon the fire districts are in direct conflict with public safety, and do not all agree with the County's interpretation of the law. It can be noted here that many of the fire districts appear to be ignoring these limitations and the County, while aware of these 'infractions,' has not attempted to enforce the statute in favor of attempting to find a more permanent, amiable solution through the efforts of this study.

Section V: Observations

Interviews with all the fire chiefs and a number of accompanying chief officers indicated an overall sincere commitment to provide their citizens with quality fire protection. I use the term 'overall' because there were several fire chiefs that, although individually sincere about their role as fire chief, held different perspectives than the others if all of the fire districts combined are considered one 'team.' These individual chiefs either felt that it is not their concern how other fire districts operate or how a fire chief handles their own district can impact the overall fire district system.

Varied internal response protocols and expectations were noted that impair resource deployment and delay response times. While not an overwhelming problem county-wide, where they do exist can create an issue for a large physical area of the county due to current response boundaries. For example, one fire district does not immediately acknowledge a dispatch page but waits until enough personnel have indicated that they are responding through the "Active 911" application, which is carried on their cell phones. This may take several dispatch pages which can span from 3 – 9 minutes. During this period there is dead air over the fire dispatch frequency, and no one knows if the primary fire district is going to respond or not. Considering that fire roughly doubles in size every minute, this can be a critical issue.

After the 3rd page with no acknowledgement, an adjacent fire district closest to the incident is paged out. This means that for an approximate 10-minute period, no one knows who is going to respond to an emergency. The other complicating factor is that not every department member may use the App to acknowledge their response, so there may be an adequate response occurring, but that will not be determined until personnel arrive at the fire station or even on the scene, if they respond directly. In the meantime, other fire districts may be posturing to respond as they hear nothing from the originally dispatched district, or they may be dispatched only to find out that the originally designated fire district has indeed responded, albeit with a delayed response acknowledgement. In one instance, the question was asked if each member consistently uses "Active 911" to confirm they are responding, to which the fire chief responded by saying "Heck, I don't even use it all of the time." What does not seem to be appreciated is the fact that what could be considered apathy towards a response can truly negatively impact public safety and damage any good will that exists between fellow fire chiefs and/or fire districts.

In another example, one fire chief does not know how many firefighters are responding until he or they get to the scene. The firefighters have been instructed not to use a radio to affirm their response. When asked why, the response was that the chief did not want the radio frequency cluttered with radio traffic from firefighters. When asked how the chief knew he would have an adequate number of firefighters responding, the response was "I usually always do." While in many cases this may be true, it is no guarantee of adequate response, and no indication of the level of resources deploying, which if insufficient, has created a significantly delay in the response of mutual aid resources.

Interview results also indicated a significant lack of faith that the County Board of Commissioners (Fire Commission) is acting in the best interests of the fire districts. Some districts have no issues with the Board because they get Board approval of their requests for equipment and infrastructure. Other districts expressed frustration with the process of going through the Board. Several fire chiefs expressed the sentiment that they resent having to get permission from the Board to spend the fire district's own money. Several chiefs felt that they should be able to autonomously spend their fire district's monies without the influence of fire board members that may not live in the fire chief's district. The fire commission can also alter spending requests. One example is where the commission directed a fire

district to purchase a used command SUV from the City instead of purchasing a new one, which would have only cost approximately \$6,000 more. From the fire department's perspective, they got a used, out-of-warranty high-mileage vehicle instead of a new one for a comparable price. The vehicle they received was completely outfitted with emergency equipment and was ready to respond, when outfitting a new vehicle can add considerable cost

While decisions like this seem practical to members of the fire commission, they do not always make sense to the fire chiefs – many of which feel the fire commissioners lack any fire suppression field knowledge or experience in managing a fire department. It does not appear that communications between the parties allowed this type of discussion. A different, cooperative approach to the decision-making process may help reduce misperceptions and result in mutually agreeable decisions.

Several fire chiefs felt that their fire district equipment and infrastructure are in dire need of upgrading, but due to their location and call volume, often had their needs overlooked or delayed. Many fire chiefs said that they have never had a fire commissioner visit their station, or if they have, it was a long time ago. As a result, most of the more-rural fire districts (primarily the western half of the County) have had to resort to home-made patches and repairs and building of their own apparatus from donated used military or forest service vehicles. Many of the observed apparatus were at least 15 – 20 years old or older, appearing to fail to current National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA) safety standards. Several fire districts had fire stations that were converted from previous occupancies (such as a vehicle repair garage) and were severely under-sized to the point where it was difficult to walk between apparatus on the floor. Various apparatus may need to be moved to get others out of the structure.

In general, there were significant disparities among the infrastructure of the fire districts. It is almost a case of the "Haves" versus the "Have-Not's" Those districts that were in fairly good shape overall – even if they didn't get everything they wanted through the fire commission, were less critical of County fire operations than those districts that found staffing, equipment and infrastructure a greater challenge, and that historically did not have positive experiences with the fire commission.

The same concern for disparities can be noted for recruit firefighter training and continuing education training and exercises. Some fire districts have more organized training programs than others. Some have training officers and follow training curriculums, while others have a very informal and inconsistent training program.

There was a universal concern expressed that jurisdictional boundaries and requirements that mandate the use of mutual or automatic aid is negatively impacting the ability to provide a timely mutual-aid or automatic aid response. For example, a fire station of one district lies adjacent to a road that is the boundary between itself and another fire district. If a fire is observed in the second fire district's response area – even if it is across the street from the first fire district's station – it is legally required that the second fire district respond to the fire and not request mutual aid (if required) until it is on the scene. Therefore, in this example, it is possible that a structure in the adjacent fire district could experience significant damage due to a longer response time than would have been the case if the fire district that has the station across the street would have been allowed to respond as well. This technically could also impact a life-safety scenario, though I think that any firefighter would disregard the technical law restricting such a response if someone's life is in jeopardy. Still, it is a standing issue that impacts the County's fire districts and appears to negatively impact the County's citizenry overall.

A number of the chief officers interviewed felt that the County would benefit from a more centralized management approach to the fire districts, with greater consistency in all aspects of fire service management and response delivery practices.

There is a general desire among the fire chiefs to do more for their districts, but real and perceived limitations seem to stand in their way. In one case the fire chief stated that he would like to be able to do all of the things that are on the official fire chief job description but lacks the training to be able to effectively perform many of the duties. Time is also a significant constraint.

Section VI: Analysis

Internal Conflict:

Based on the observations noted in the previous section, Reno County appears to be a County in conflict with itself regarding fire service delivery. The fire districts in the eastern half of the county, where the majority of the population base is, appears to be faring better than those in the more rural, western half of the county. The fact that a larger population base can better support a fire district financially than a more sparsely populated region comes into play. Yet, fire poses the same threat to firefighters notwithstanding. The personal protective equipment, apparatus resources and minimum staffing level requirements are the same, regardless of geographical location.

Finances:

The County Board of Commissioners, which is also the Fire Commission, appears to be primarily concerned with the fire districts exercising prudent fiscal management practices. While this is an understandable concern, it also lends itself to the perceived lack of overall confidence by the fire districts that the commission has their overall best interests in mind.

A less subjective scrutiny of requested purchases could help to meet a fire district's needs and remove the perception of underinformed decisions by the fire commissioners or possible favoritism towards specific fire districts more adequately. This is not to say that some fire chiefs may have approached the commission lacking specific data to support their requests, making the commission's decision understandable, but the perception that the county is telling the fire districts how to spend the district's own money is still a negative outcome of the process.

Additional areas such as firefighter safety, training, equipment, and other infrastructure need equal consideration. NFPA professional standards exist that can be referenced for each of these areas. While the NFPA standards are consensus based and not mandated unless they are adopted by reference by a local governing body, they should at least be considered as part of an overall comprehensive management system for all the fire districts.

Primary Concerns:

Maintaining staffing is the most common and greatest concern, followed closely by fiscal and training concerns. Equipment and infrastructure updating, or replacement, is also a significant issue. There is a negative perception by several of the fire districts that the Commission appears to be indifferent to their needs, forcing these districts to adapt as best possible and try to maintain services with what they currently have. These concerns were also noted as impacting a district's ability to recruit and retain firefighters.

Standard Operating Guideline (S.O.G):

The S.O.G. is the fire service's industry standard to insure consistent practices in both non-emergency and emergency situations. It is a written directive that establishes a standard course of action that explain what is expected and required of fire service personnel in performing their jobs. It supplements and more clearly defines the requirements found in fire service job descriptions. It is called a *Guideline* rather than a *Procedure* as emergencies are fluid in nature, and officers and firefighters are expected to be able to adapt to a changing situation that may require modified actions from the norm. In short, they are expected to use their heads and do what is needed and appropriate to deal with the situation – a flexibility that a guideline gives that a procedure does not. The officer/firefighter needs to be able to explain and justify why there was the variance from the guideline and how the results justified the action. These actions should still be within accepted fire service norms and legal. Examples of SOG's would be to govern the use of the Incident Command System (ICS), how to correctly operate equipment and apparatus, how and when to don/doff personal protective equipment (PPE), safety considerations, administrative procedures for requesting equipment repairs, submitting reports, etc.

The mentioning of S.O.G.'s is due to the observed practice of utilizing PPE and acceptable firefighting techniques being a mixed bag. Some firefighters were observed properly wearing all PPE while at a fire scene, while others were observed only wearing partial PPE. On-scene organization using at least aspects of the Incident Command System (ICS) was observed, but a more standardized approach would be beneficial in mutual aid and task force response situations. While not observed during the site visit, interviews yielded stories of Incident Commanders demonstrating a very narrow focus on the incident, ignoring the more threatening big picture. In some cases, an incoming officer assumed command when they observed a chaotic scene upon their arrival, and the initial IC was committed to a specific, focused operation. The practice of safely backing the apparatus using a spotter was also demonstrated intermittently. These types of issues are commonly resolved only after an accident occurs or when someone is injured – a reactive vs. proactive approach to common sense practices. Haste, lack of available staffing or poor scene management are often the root cause of these and other accidents.

Jurisdictional Boundaries:

There appears to be a conflict between the public's best interest and statute limitations based on fire district boundaries. This conflict results in hindered response times that result in an increased risk to life safety, incident stabilization and property conservation. The locations of some fire station locations appear to have been determined in the past by political or business considerations rather than from a data-driven process. This has resulted in less-than-optimal locations for overall response times within a district and has contributed to the conflicted debate over automatic and mutual aid policies when a fire station location would facilitate a quicker response into an adjacent jurisdiction.

Many of fire chiefs stated that they have found a way to 'work around' these (and other) perceived limitations and stretch acceptable action boundaries when taking statutes and county directives into consideration. Several of the fire districts are providing services outside of their jurisdiction, completely disregarding the County's interpretation of State Statute, which requires some form of regular mutual reciprocity among the participating fire districts.

Training:

Training in many aspects of the fire service, including basic and specialty firefighter training (such as dealing with hazardous materials) and Company Officer and Chief Officer training is lacking. This can impact not only firefighter health and safety, but firefighter and chief officer morale and confidence in their abilities. It is also supporting the view that there really is no county oversight or backing for

important areas such as training. When training does occur, it is generally reactive in nature, based on recent incidents rather than proactive training based on reputable curriculums such as the International Fire Service Training Association (IFSTA) or the Maryland Fire and Rescue Institute (MFRI) both provide. There are few, if any, certified fire service instructors to be found within the ranks of the fire districts. Those that are, are most likely affiliated with the technical college.

Training was better years ago when the local technical college was more involved, providing well trained instructors and regular training opportunities. The general desire was for a return to greater involvement with the college.

Autonomy of Fire Districts

Each fire district is an entity to itself with the board of county commissioners the governing body of each district within the county by state law. The County provides limited administrative support in fiscal areas, and each district is required to abide by the County purchasing policy that requires pre-approval of any purchase more than \$5,000. This has created discord among some of the districts which do not understand that Kansas State law requires the County to oversee the fire district's fiscal spending.

Each fire chief currently manages their district the way they see fit, with little interaction between districts, save the periodic county fire chiefs meeting. This has resulted in a mixed bag of management practices and department standards. How a fire chief manages a fire district has a distinct impact on the county system overall. Management practices that rely on the resources of other fire districts cause those resources to be stretched even further. Fire chiefs that fail to promote training and education do not contribute to the improvement and professionalism of their firefighters and may create increased risk of injury or death to their firefighters.

This autonomy has been created because of the long-standing practice of limited involvement by the County, and the fire districts desire to be left alone as much as possible. The situation as resulted in a lack of consistency in fire ground practices, untrained or undertrained personnel, varied levels, and quality of PPE, etc. It also results in confusion among command practices including the proper use of the Incident Command System, strategies and tactics, and inconsistent fire ground actions by firefighters from different departments attempting to work together in a mutual aid situation.

Having a common set of performance standards and expectations and allowing each fire chief to choose how they meet those standards and expectations, so long it is done in a professional manner, is a healthy way to allow fire districts to adapt to any situations unique to their district yet allowing for consistency when working with other districts. It also gives the fire chief the sense of individualism while still being part of an overall team. Districts should be encouraged to work with each other to problem solve and achieve mutually inclusive goals, leaning on each other's experience rather than taking the view that everyone else should keep their nose out of their district's business.

Response Times and Effectiveness

Response time data obtained from 911 dispatch center records do not tell the whole story and can be deceiving. While the first unit on scene may have a timely response time, if the arriving unit is not staffed and equipped properly, it cannot achieve any type of effective response. An example obtained during one interview demonstrates this fact: A brush fire response truck arrived on the scene of a modest grass fire within about 15 minutes of dispatch, staffed by two firefighters who attempted to extinguish the fire themselves. Their inability to contain the fire allowed it to spread, and after about an

hour the fire had grown to the point that it took a significant mutual aid response and nearly 8 hours to extinguish the fire that had grown into a wildland fire that covered significant acreage.

Fire Reporting Requirements

KAR22-5 requires the fire chief to submit an incident report for each incident where a response is made, a casualty report for each civilian casualty (injury or death) that occurs as the result of any fire or explosion, and casualty reports for each firefighter casualty (injury or death) that occurs while acting in an official role as a firefighter. The State has specific requirements for what are acceptable reporting forms, which must be approved by the state fire marshal. (See Appendix III)

Few fire chiefs stated that they submitted incident reports as required by State Law. One can only assume that injury reports are also under reported. Perhaps some of the hesitation to filing required reports are the attention that could be drawn to a fire department in situations that could bring omissions to light.

Key Points Derived:

The following main points have been derived from this study:

1. The majority of the fire chiefs and chief officers have a high level of commitment towards serving the citizens with excellent response services.
2. A minority of the fire chiefs would like to see an effective response from their districts, but do not appear to take steps to help assure that this is the norm. These districts will rely on the 'system' to take up any slack within their own district system.
3. Fire districts in the more rural areas that do not have the population base or industry to support the level of funding to obtain and maintain more modern equipment. It is therefore much more difficult for these districts to make improvements and attract volunteers. As a result, both the district and its citizens suffer more than fire districts located in the urbanized areas of the county when it comes to quality of emergency fire services.
4. Most fire districts would like to see a centralized training program with qualified instructors. The concern with untrained, local firefighters being the instructors is that it could at best be poor training and at worst, dangerous to the firefighters themselves.
5. These fire districts would also like to see centralized fire district management that is led by a trained and experienced fire service professional.
6. The current autonomy that the fire districts currently have appears to be an overall detriment to developing standard professional practices, including mandates such as State incident reporting requirements.
7. To achieve this type of centralized management that is led by a trained and experienced fire service professional will require a radical restructuring of the fire district system. The current system of multiple autonomous fire districts will not facilitate this strategy, as evidenced by the 1986 Fire District Memo (Attachment I) that stated "...it will no longer suffice for this Board to

allow the Districts to “run themselves...,” and advising the Districts that “Definite written policies for the administration and operation of the Fire Districts will be necessary...” which still does not appear to have occurred 35 years later.

8. There is a way to capitalize on the career / volunteer fire department system that is present in the County to best protect the greatest percentage of property value and population base, both of which are within 15 – 20 minutes travel time of the City.

Section VII: Historical Relevance

It is important to this study that the observations and perspectives in this report be taken within the context of the history of the County’s concerns over the operations of the fire districts. In a March 17, 1986 letter from then Board of County /Commissioners Chairman Lewis H. Larson to the Reno County Fire District No. 2 Advisory Board Chair Claud Morris, Chairman Larson stated, “We find that the general policy of previous Boards of County Commissioners has been to allow the Districts to run themselves.” He then goes on to later say “As the scope of service provided by the Fire Districts expands along with budget increases and increased liability exposure, it no long will suffice for this Board to allow the Districts to “run themselves.” Definite written policies for the administration and operation of the Fire Districts will be necessary.”

Apparently, the direction given in 1986 either did not take hold, or the monitoring and enforcement of the County’s directive eventually broke down, as an August 4, 1999 memo from Mr. Joe O’Sullivan to the Board of County Commissioners and then County Administrator Ed Williams continues to address issues related to the fire districts and their fire chiefs. The topic at that time was the consolidation of Volunteer Fire Districts into one fire district to allow for the centralized management and command and control of fire service delivery within the fire districts. In his memo, Mr. O’Sullivan states “It is obvious to me from the last meeting with the chiefs...that the chiefs do not agree to a lesser authority than that which they currently enjoy.” He further states to the Board “It is inadvisable, in my opinion, to proceed with consolidation while allowing the chiefs to believe their concept of operations will prevail, unless, of course, you agree with their concept.”

Based on the results of this 2020-2021 study, the concerns of 1986 and 1999 continue to be valid in 2021, with no action having been taken to change the course.

Section VIII. Recommendations:

The following recommendations are respectfully submitted for consideration. A detailed study of Kansas State Law will need to occur to determine how a particular recommendation may be impacted. Both recommendations I and II can stand on their individual merits and are not mutually dependent upon each other.

Obviously, the Board of County Commissioners will ultimately need to decide if any recommendation should be implemented, or if the current system of volunteer fire districts and the level of service is satisfactory.

I. Mandate Improvements That Meet Current Fire Service Best Practices:

- A. The Board of County Commissioners, as the governing authority over the fire districts, create a process in which all of the individual fire district fire chiefs are mandated to improve practices including, but not limited to, the development of common management and operational practices, such as Standard Operating Guidelines (SOG's), budgeting procedures (including a Capital Improvement Plan [CIP]), training practices, officer development and planning efforts. The Board of County Commissioners would hold the chiefs accountable (as they should currently be doing) or provide someone that has the support of the Board with the administrative/ operational authority over the districts to ensure compliance.

Those fire chiefs that refuse to cooperate and comply with the Board's directive are to be relieved of their duties.

- B. Develop or use an established curriculum for a Chief Officer training program. The curriculum should be adapted to Reno County's needs to assist chief officers attain the skills to successfully perform the duties outlined in the fire chief job description.
- C. Create a liaison fire chief position from among the fire district fire chiefs to function as the representative of the fire districts to discuss issues, bring ideas and recommendations or otherwise creatively problem solve with the Board of County Commissioners.
- D. Create and adopt a Strategic Plan to set priorities for meeting the County's fire service needs, focus energy and resources to accomplish each priority, strengthen operations and ensure that the fire chief, his/her chief officers, local officers, firefighters, and other stakeholders are working toward common goals. The strategic plan will help establish mutual agreement on intended outcomes and assess and adjust the organization's direction in response to a changing environment.

The Strategic Plan may include an analysis of current fire district boundaries along with any recommended changes, or the development of practices that ensure compliance with current state statutes that regulate how emergency services can be delivered outside a fire district.

It would also address the state of fire district infrastructure, including a refurbishment and/or replacement schedule and how to innovatively address the needs of fire districts that face fiscal constraints as part of the greater County Fire Department.

II. Consolidate Current Fire Districts into One District with One Fire Chief:

- A. Establish a system that allows individual Townships to retain their identity as a member of the greater fire protection system yet supports centralized management and a collaborative decision-making process that include purchasing policies that are developed based on need and safety benefits.
- B. Allocate budget dollars across current fire district borders to be able to spend monies where the most critical need is, ensuring minimum standards are met throughout the County.

- C. Centralize training and other critical aspects that impact operational preparedness and performance.
- D. Each former fire district to be led by a local chief officer (deputy or battalion chief).
- E. The points under recommendation 'I' remain applicable and are incorporated into this recommendation.

Note: This recommendation revisits the 1999 idea of consolidating the volunteer fire districts into one district, to be led by one professional fire chief; the district could be subdivided into several response districts to provide for optimal response times from the existing fire stations, with each response district being managed by an Assistant or Deputy Fire Chief, under the Fire Chief's direction.

III. In cooperation/negotiation with the City of Hutchinson Fire Department, develop a response system that incorporates a City fire department response to those residential and commercial districts within a 20-minute response time of City Limits.

The HFD can provide a staffed fire engine for immediate response upon dispatch.

- 91% of the County's population live within a 20-minute response time of the HFD.
- 83% of parcels within the County are within a 20-minute response time of the HFD.
- 94% of parcel valuation within the County are within a 20-minute response time of the HFD.

This first response capability would not replace the response from the fire district but rather provide a fast initial response, establishment of command, and first-in fire suppression efforts. Fire doubles in size every minute, and the ability to attack a fire during its incipient stage is critical to reducing the potential for injury or loss of life to the residents and increasing firefighter and fire ground safety. This service option should be a consideration regardless of any outcome of this study.

Section IX. Public Education

As mentioned earlier in this report, it is questionable if the public is aware of the issues surrounding some current fire district operations. Fire chiefs are often popular and respected public servants, despite a chief's tendency to resist change or promote best practices. A fire chief can be very politically savvy and persuasive in his/her argument to support their position, especially among the uninformed citizen who relies on the fire chief to protect their best interests.

If the Board of County Commissioners cannot unilaterally consolidate the fire districts into one district, or if a referendum(s) would be required to support such a change, then the County would need to make significant efforts to educate the public on why such a change is needed and is in the citizen's best interest.

Section: X: Closing Comments:

Reno County finds itself in a unique and challenging time, but also a time of great opportunity. Fire Districts and their respective chiefs have continued to provide emergency services to their citizens despite fiscal, staffing, and other challenges.

A number of participants recognized many of the issues with the current system, but short of greater county support and involvement, did not offer any recommendations for improvement. About a third of those interviewed brought up the suggestion that centralized leadership and overall management by

someone with expertise in fire service management would be of great benefit and help reduce or eliminate the differences between the fire districts.

It is the opinion of this consultant that those that would oppose a system with centralized management and coordination are currently not performing their duties with the best interests of the county's citizens, nor the citizens of their own fire district. These fire chiefs are basing their opposition on their resistance to change. They did not appear to be willing to put in the effort it takes to improve response readiness, including training and other factors, but were more concerned about protecting their management styles – which are contributing to the environment that created the desire for this study to begin with. It was easy for them to justify their management style by implying that to put greater demands upon their firefighters (training, dispatch acknowledgment, etc.) would result in firefighters quitting.

The County Board of Commissioners needs to be 'all in' as the governing body of the fire districts. This means keeping a finger on the pulse of the fire districts within the county, recognizing problems and being part of the solution. This also means being pro-active rather than reactive and 'managing by crisis.'

The County has basically two choices it can make, depending on its view of the issues that were the catalyst for this study. The County can choose to either 1) disagree with the opinion that current management and operational practices of the County's Volunteer Fire Districts are severely lacking, posing liability exposures, or 2) it can recognize the risk exposures that the outcomes of this study represent and support a change process to improve services and management practices and fire district professionalism, thereby significantly reducing risks to its firefighters and the citizens they serve.

What cannot be allowed to happen is the continuation of the decades-old controversy. Reno County must take steps to make improvements one way or another or declare that the current system is in the best interest of the public, and then with intent, accept the situation and hold its peace.