2026

Sumner County Volunteer Fire Long-Term Funding Solution

VFD AD-HOC RECOMMENDATIONS

VFD Ad-Hoc Committee:
J. Wes Wynne, Chairman
Chris Shoemaker, Vice Chairman
Ben Harris, Commissioner
David Klein, Commissioner
Scotty Bush, Chief
Chris Edgerton, Chief
Sam Thornton, Chief
Henry DeGroot, Citizen
Curtis Williams, Citizen

Executive Summary

Sumner County's volunteer fire departments provide a critical and cost-effective emergency response capability for residents of the County's unincorporated areas. The current system consists of nine independent volunteer fire departments operating thirteen stations. While the volunteer model continues to provide significant value, the VFD Ad-Hoc Committee's evaluation found that the structure supporting these departments is on an unsustainable trajectory. Staffing pressures, aging apparatus and safety equipment, facility limitations, population growth, changing service areas, fragmented planning, and insufficient funding are compounding one another and increasingly challenging the ability of individual departments to address these issues independently.

The current County funding model compounds these challenges. Sumner County currently provides $1.3 million annually through donations to the VFDs. This funding primarily supports existing operations while critical equipment replacement and maintenance are deferred. Because these funds are provided as donations, the County has limited ability to establish service expectations, measure performance, or maintain an ownership interest in assets purchased with taxpayer funds. The Committee estimates approximately $2.5 million annually would ultimately be required for the VFDs to operate at an optimal level but recognizes that additional funding alone will not resolve the underlying coordination, staffing, equipment, training, and service-delivery challenges.

The Committee therefore recommends a phased Crawl/Walk/Run approach designed to strengthen and sustain the existing volunteer system while establishing greater coordination, accountability, and long-term financial stability. The intent is not to eliminate, consolidate, or municipalize the independent VFDs. Rather, the objective is to create a County framework that better supports their continued operation while ensuring taxpayer funding is connected to measurable emergency-response capabilities and results.

Phase 1: Build the Foundation

During the first 12 months, the County would maintain the existing funding method while establishing a County Fire Marshal/Coordinator and permanent Fire Services Subcommittee. The Coordinator would serve as an administrative support and coordination resource without operational authority over the independent VFDs. This position is the critical first step in establishing reliable data, assessing staffing and coverage, evaluating equipment and capital needs, coordinating training and grants, improving interoperability, and developing the standards and plans necessary for future decisions.

Phase 2: Establish Accountability and Sustainable Funding

During months 12 through 24, the County would establish a Countywide fire department structured around contracted rural fire protection provided by VFDs and applicable municipal partners. Service zones and contractual expectations would be established, with performance-based criteria tied directly to County funding. The Fire Marshal/Coordinator would transition to County Fire Chief to administer contracts and oversee service performance. County-purchased apparatus and safety equipment would remain County assets and be leased to VFDs, protecting taxpayer investment while providing departments access to needed equipment.

The proposed funding structure would transition away from annual General Fund donations and designate existing situs-based and shared revenues for rural fire protection. Operational funding would initially remain at the current level while the Coordinator works with departments to improve capability and establish reliable performance baselines. Future increases in operational funding would be tied to demonstrated service performance and validated needs, while remaining designated revenue could begin addressing the significant apparatus and equipment replacement backlog.

Phase 3: Contingency if Existing Funding Becomes Insufficient

Phase 3 remains a contingency, not an immediate recommendation. Fire tax districts would be considered only if existing designated revenues, shared revenues, grants, and phased appropriations eventually become insufficient to support adopted service standards. Evaluation would be driven by measurable conditions such as recurring funding capacity, apparatus replacement needs, staffing capability, response performance, and the ability of contracted providers to meet minimum standards.

The alternative to action carries increasing risk. Maintaining the current approach allows equipment and capital backlogs to continue growing while volunteer staffing pressures and accountability limitations remain unresolved. Over time, individual department failures or increasing coverage gaps could force the County to intervene reactively and potentially assume significantly greater emergency-service costs without adequate planning.

At its core, this recommendation seeks to move Sumner County from nine largely independent planning processes toward a coordinated Countywide support structure, while preserving the independence and operational authority of the volunteer departments. Success will be measured through objective indicators of readiness, staffing, training, interoperability, resource utilization, accountability, and sustainability rather than simply through increased spending.

Coordinate where coordination adds value. Standardize where interoperability and safety require it. Preserve local independence where local control remains appropriate.

The immediate priority is therefore not simply additional funding. It is establishing the County Fire Marshal/Coordinator and the organizational structure necessary to understand current capabilities, coordinate resources, establish reliable baselines, and begin addressing the systemic challenges facing rural fire protection. This provides Sumner County with a measured path forward that supports its volunteers, protects taxpayers, improves accountability, and strengthens emergency-response capability without prematurely abandoning the volunteer model that has served the County for decades.

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VFD Ad-Hoc – Evaluation and Observations

The VFD Ad-Hoc was tasked with studying Sumner County's persistent VFD funding issues to make a recommendation for a long-term funding solution. The committee evaluated multiple factors contributing to our VFDs funding challenges that include staffing, equipment, facilities, and system resiliency. Numerous variables in each area were identified resulting from two main areas of concern – 1) nine individual and fragmented planning processes, and 2) population growth and development pressures. Both are creating headwinds which continue to compound and make volunteer service more difficult to sustain under the current service model and funding source.

Along with the committee's recommendation, the information contained in this report identifies these challenges and defines what options Sumner County has at its disposal to address them.

Staffing

1. Rate of volunteerism is at a low point nationally with younger generations having more focus on quality time with families outside of their normal 8-to-5 working hours. This limits the pool of volunteers willing to serve and puts additional strain on the VFD leaders' time to recruit and oversee or execute administrative tasks.
2. Majority of volunteers have more availability to respond during weekday evenings and weekend timeframes, leaving a gap in coverage during daytime hours.
3. Timeline to train and certify new recruits is too long primarily due to low frequency of medical related training and lack of coordination between all VFDs.
4. Equipment and facilities lack basics to help attract and retain volunteers.

Equipment

Each station has at least one fire engine, fire tanker, and a lighter duty response vehicle. Most VFDs do not have adequate turnout gear, SCBAs or radios to equip new recruits or provide proper protective equipment for existing members.

1. Life expectancy of apparatus varies depending on type of equipment and amount of use.
    a. Fire Engine – 15-20 years
    b. Fire Tanker – 20-25 years
    c. Brush Truck - 15-20 years
    d. Turnout Gear – 10 years
    e. SCBA – 10 years
    f. Radios – 15 years

2. Very few VFDs have apparatus within the acceptable life expectancy range.
    a. 5 of 13 stations have at least one piece of apparatus within the acceptable life expectancy
    b. Zero (0) stations have all apparatus within the acceptable life expectancy
    c. Apparatus outside of life expectancy can be used as backup/contingency
3. Estimated apparatus replacement exceeds **$19.1m**,
    a. Fire Engine – 11 needed @ $750k per = $8.3M
    b. Fire Tanker – 10 needed @ $600k per = $6.0M
    c. Brush Truck – 8 needed @ $150k per = $1.2M
    d. Turnout Gear – 260 sets needed (20 per station) @ $5.5k per = $1.4M
    e. SCBA – 195 needed (15 per station) @ $11.5k = $2.2M
    f. Radios - $2.5k per (not included in total)

Apparatus continues to have not only significant cost but also a significant wait time that averages 30 months from time of order to time of receipt.

Facilities

1. Very few facilities have the necessary setup to accommodate full-time/career staffing, no bathroom, day room or sleep quarters.
2. Annexation activity over time has caused station locations to no longer be in an optimal location to service current station coverage areas, creating additional coverage hurdles that need to be evaluated.
3. Capital needs for facility improvement were not evaluated by this Ad-Hoc and are not included in the final recommendation; however, this is an area that will need to be evaluated as the population and call volumes continue to rise.

Operational Funding

Nine VFDs operate thirteen stations throughout Sumner County to primarily serve our unincorporated areas. Donation requests submitted by the VFDs are sufficient to only fund maintaining status quo, with inflationary pressures adding additional strain on already limited resources. Donation funding from Sumner County has maintained $100k per station ($1.3M annually) for the past two budget cycles. This level of donation is primarily covering operational expenses, with maintenance and replacement of critical safety gear being deferred due to resource strain.

Current state: $100k per station ($1.3M) → maintain operations →deferred equipment and maintenance → staffing gaps → inconsistent capabilities.

Operational budgeting needed to fully fund the VFDs at optimal operations was estimated by the VFD Ad-Hoc at **$192k per station ($2.5M annually)**. Once at the optimal operating condition, the estimated budgeting need allows the VFDs to purchase and maintain the appropriate safety equipment to continue to serve Sumner County.

Future state: Defined funding → contracts → minimum capability requirements → measurable response capabilities → capital replacement plan → accountability.

Service Models

Only 3 models are available for unincorporated fire coverage, and each have limited funding options available.

1. **Independent Volunteer** (current model) – Donation is the only funding source. This provides limited liability for the County but also creates ZERO oversight for how funding is spent once donated. Most cost-effective option with no control on service or spending.
2. **Contracted Outsourced** – The contracted service can be outsourced to a private entity, municipal career service, independent volunteer, or a combination of the three. This can be funded through fire districts, situs-based revenues, and private donations. Since this is a contractual service, oversight can be built into the contract that sets service standards associated with funding. This option allows for a significant improvement in oversight without the need for heavy capital investments, utilizing the infrastructure that is already in place.
3. **County Wide Career Fire Service** – The County would be responsible for the establishment and maintenance of paid full-time staff, equipment, and facilities. This can be funded through fire districts, situs-based revenues, and private donations. This option has the most oversight and control for County fire service, but would also require heavy capital investments in equipment and facilities and has the longest timeline to implement (3-5 years)

The donation model has served our County over the past 30+ years but is no longer adequate to sustain the needs of our independent VFDs given the cultural headwinds prevalent throughout our nation (lower donation frequency, lower volunteerism). The current donation level of Sumner County government is equivalent to one penny of the tax rate with ZERO ability to implement oversight.

VFDs provide a valuable service that helps to offset additional EMS expenses that would have to be incurred by Sumner County with the absence of a volunteer service in our unincorporated areas of the County (~89% of calls answered are medical related). Vehicle extrication, extended response time to scene, reduced personnel availability to assist are a

few examples of areas where additional expenses would be incurred to make up coverage gaps.

Several alternatives have been explored in the past that include utility districts and subscription fees – neither have proven to be sustainable in other counties that implemented these alternatives.

The VFD Ad-Hoc committee recognizes that the **independent volunteer** model currently utilized for unincorporated fire coverage is the **most cost-effective** means for accomplishing fire coverage and emergency response in this area of our County. This model is not entirely broken, however, the committee acknowledges our current model is on an **unsustainable trajectory** for ensuring adequate emergency services coverage in the unincorporated areas of our County and will at some point in the near future require substantial investment by Sumner County if our course is not corrected soon.

Funding Sources (T.C.A. § 5-17-101)

There are 4 funding methods allowed by State law for funding fire services in the unincorporated areas of the County.

1. **Donation** (current method) – Donations can be made to independent volunteer fire departments.
2. **Fire and Emergency services tax district**(s) – Annual fire and emergency services tax can be levied on property in each district for the purpose of funding the activities of the fire department within that district.
3. **Situs-based taxes** – General fund revenues tied to where the taxable activity occurs (taxes collected in unincorporated areas) or revenue sources already shared with municipalities. (ex. unincorporated local option sales tax, business tax from unincorporated businesses, beer/alcohol-related taxes from unincorporated establishments, and eligible shared revenues such as TVA PILOT funds)
4. **General Fund** – with mutual aid agreement (pertaining to fire services) with each municipality the County may fund up-to 50% of the cost to provide fire services to the unincorporated areas using general funds.

Funding sources 2-4 are the only options that offer Sumner County the ability to have some level of funding oversight and accountability for taxpayer funding. The statute expressly allows a County to establish a Countywide fire department using performance-based criteria designed to ensure timely response and effective services. To leverage these funding sources Sumner County would need to do five things:

1. Identify/define the specific funding source
2. Establish a County Fire Department

3. Appoint a Fire Chief
4. Define service zone/fire districts
5. Obtain State Fire Marshal recognition for newly established County Fire department under the Fire Department Recognition Act – T.C.A. §68-102-3

The VFD Ad-Hoc committee recognizes that Sumner County is leveraging one penny of the tax rate to fund VFDs through donations with **ZERO legal oversight authority** for how the donated funds are expended or **legal ability to set service expectations** tied to receiving these funds. Further any equipment purchased using these donated funds does not give Sumner County any claim to the assets purchased using taxpayer funds in the event a VFD becomes insolvent.

VFD Ad-Hoc Recommendation

The VFD Ad-Hoc committee recommends the following phased approach be implemented to address the structure of unincorporated fires coverage and VFD funding issues that have persisted in Sumner County over the past 30+ years. The intent of this recommendation is not to eliminate, consolidate, or municipalize the independent volunteer fire departments. The objective is to establish a sustainable County framework that supports their continued operation while creating accountability for taxpayer funding.

Phase 1 (first 12 months) – Maintain current funding source

1. Establish the position of County Fire Marshal/Coordinator
    a) This position is an administrative support role and has no authority over the Independent VFDs and per TCA would report under the Mayor.
    b) Implement 24-month roadmap
    c) Duties to include, but not limited to (see JBA for full list of duties):
        - Establish standardized data collection and performance reporting
        - Coverage and response assessment
        - Equipment assessment and development of capital replacement schedule
        - Staffing needs and challenges
        - Grant coordination
        - Develop support and readiness plan, asset ownership, lease standards, maintenance obligations and disposition policies to be implemented in Phase 2
2. Create a permanent Fire Services Subcommittee under the HEMS Committee

a. Members would serve in an advisory capacity to study fire related issues and provide continuity, collaboration, and informed guidance on County fire service
b. Advise and assist the Mayor's office with advertising the position of Fire Marshal/Coordinator, as well as vetting and interviewing applicants.

Phase 2 (12-24 months) – Establish a County wide fire department following a contracted outsourced model utilizing VFDs for rural fire protection, and transition to situs-based unincorporated revenue designation for a permanent funding source.

1. Establish County wide fire department utilizing a contracted outsourced model with VFDs and municipalities for rural fire protection
    a. Define boundaries for service zones
    b. Define contractual language for rural fire protection services with performance-based criteria tied to funding
    c. Establish a County Fire Department
    d. Transition County Fire Marshal/Coordinator to County Fire Chief to begin administering contracts and overseeing service performance
    e. Obtain State Fire Marshal recognition for newly established County Fire department under the Fire Department Recognition Act – T.C.A. §68-102-3
    f. Update mutual aid and interlocal agreements as needed
2. Allocate 100% of TVA PILOT funds and Beer Tax for VFD funding (~$2.5m annual average)
    a. Start with $1.3M (current level) to cover operational expenses
    b. Remaining funds should be directed to an Apparatus/Equipment reserve fund maintained by the County to purchase replacement apparatus and safety equipment
    c. Equipment purchased should be leased to VFDs to protect taxpayer investments, not donated
    d. Increase in operational funding levels would strictly be tied to performance of services

The County is already funding the VFDs at $1.3M with annual donations from the general fund. Once contracts are implemented the donation funding ceases. The general fund must absorb $1.2M of displaced expenditures, however there are leavers available to the County outside of property tax increases or fire taxes to replace this revenue if absorption is not a viable alternative.

Phase 3 – If/when Sumner County cannot meet the operational funding needs through existing situs-based revenue, shared revenue, grants, or phased appropriations a transition to fire tax districts would be necessary at that time.

Phase 3 evaluation occurs if:

- Recurring revenues cannot support adopted minimum service standards
- Apparatus replacement backlog exceeds an established threshold
- Staffing falls below adopted capability standards
- Response capabilities deteriorate despite corrective actions
- Contracted providers cannot reliably meet minimum performance standards

Risk of Doing Nothing

If Sumner County maintains the current service model and funding approach the risk associated vary in degree of severity.

Near-term

- Equipment continues to age and safety of volunteers continues
- Volunteer staffing pressures continue
- Capital backlog continues to grow
- County continues funding without contractual accountable

Medium-term

- Individual VFD failure becomes increasingly possible
- Emergency coverage gaps increase
- County may have to intervene reactively

Long-term

- County could be forced into a much more expensive career or hybrid system without adequate planning

Conclusion

The VFD Ad-Hoc fully supports a **Crawl/Walk/Run** approach to solving the decades long funding and support issues present in Sumner County. Day-to-day operational support and coordination is necessary to slow and reverse the unsustainable trajectory of the

independent volunteer model currently leveraged to serve parts of our County. Challenges with recruitment and retention of volunteers, declining donations, and a backlog of non-compliant equipment cannot be overcome alone by the individual VFDs.

Establishing the County Fire Marshal/Coordinator is the first step necessary to establish baselines for performance, reporting and service standards, interoperability of equipment, economies of scale for purchasing and grant applications, as well as oversight and accountability for the use of taxpayer funding.

The situs-based revenue identified is generated from the unincorporated areas of the County but are used to fund County wide services that include services for those residents living within a municipality's boundaries. The combination of these two situs-based funds are leveraged in other counties throughout the State of Tennessee to fund rural fire protection services and have been proven to be a sustainable funding source for this type of service. Subscription and Utility models were evaluated as alternate situs-based revenues but were found to have unique administrative and enforcement challenges that lead the Ad-Hoc to conclude were not sustainable funding sources.

Contractual service agreements tied to funding support provide our VFDs with a reliable and verifiable funding stream. This alone opens the door to financing options that have not previously been available to our VFDs.

Leveraging fire tax districts or fire fees should be used as a fallback when Sumner County can no longer meet the service standards and need with designated funding sources.

Appendix

Sumner County Fire Marshal/Coordinator - 60/120/180-Day Action Plan & 24-Month Roadmap

Role Mission

The Fire Marshal/Coordinator will serve as the central coordination and support resource for Sumner County's volunteer fire service, working collaboratively with volunteer fire departments, municipal fire departments, EMS, County government, and other public safety partners.

The Fire Marshal/Coordinator's role is to strengthen coordination, improve readiness, reduce duplication, improve interoperability, and address systemic challenges while preserving the operational authority and independence of each volunteer fire department.

The following guidelines are suggested and are subject to review.

FIRST 60 DAYS - Listen, Assess & Establish the Baseline

Primary Objective: Develop an accurate picture of current capabilities, immediate needs, relationships, and risks.

Priority Actions

- Meet individually with the leadership of every VFD.
- Meet with County EMS leadership and appropriate municipal fire leadership.
- Establish regular communication with the County Mayor, HEMS committee, Emergency Management, and other appropriate County officials.
- Create a central contact directory for fire chiefs, officers, training contacts, EMS, EMA, dispatch, and municipal partners.
- Inventory each VFD's active membership and staffing availability, daytime staffing, apparatus and major equipment, stations and facilities, training capabilities, certifications, communications capabilities, existing mutual-aid arrangements, and current grants and grant needs.
- Review existing SOPs/SOGs across departments.
- Review current dispatch, response, mutual-aid, and communications practices.
- Identify service gaps.
- Establish a consistent method for departments to communicate needs and issues to the coordinator.

60-Day Deliverables

- Countywide VFD contact and leadership directory
- Initial department capability inventory
- List of immediate operational concerns
- Preliminary staffing and availability assessment
- Inventory of existing SOPs/SOGs and mutual-aid practices
- Initial list of grant and funding opportunities
- Recommended priorities for Days 61-180

DAYS 61-120 - Coordinate, Prioritize & Begin Early Action

Primary Objective: Move from information gathering to coordinated action on the most important common challenges.

Priority Actions

- Develop a Countywide training calendar and identify opportunities for departments to train together.
- Evaluate training gaps, particularly recurring medical-response training and high-risk/low-frequency fire incidents.
- Identify instructors and facilities that can be shared across departments.
- Develop a Countywide recruitment strategy that departments can use locally.
- Identify barriers to joining and remaining active in the volunteer service.
- Explore partnerships with schools, community organizations, and workforce programs.
- Create a centralized grant opportunity calendar and prioritize applications with Countywide or multi-department benefit.
- Identify common equipment needs that could support joint purchasing or shared-resource strategies.
- Identify significant differences in mutual-aid procedures, communications, and operating practices.
- Begin identifying SOP/SOG areas where voluntary Countywide alignment would improve interoperability.
- Review opportunities to improve automatic or mutual-aid response between departments.

120-Day Deliverables

- Countywide training calendar
- Initial recruitment and retention strategy
- Grant opportunity calendar
- Prioritized shared equipment/resource list

- Initial interoperability and SOP/SOG gap assessment
- Recommendations for immediate coordination improvements

DAYS 121-180 - Implement, Measure & Establish the Operating Rhythm

Primary Objective: Put the new coordination structure into regular operation and establish measurable priorities.

Priority Actions

- Coordinate the first multi-department training activities.
- Launch initial Countywide recruitment efforts.
- Establish a recurring Fire Chiefs/leadership coordination meeting.
- Establish a regular reporting process to the HEMS committee.
- Develop an agreed set of baseline performance measures in regards to response and training.
- Begin implementation of high-priority interoperability improvements.
- Develop recommendations for improving daytime response capability.
- Develop a prioritized Countywide apparatus and major equipment needs assessment.
- Identify opportunities for shared equipment purchasing, training, and administrative support.
- Establish a grant pipeline with responsible parties and submission deadlines.
- Present the first State of the Volunteer Fire Service assessment to the HEMS committee.

180-Day Deliverables

- Fire service baseline assessment
- Countywide priority list
- Recurring chiefs coordination process
- HEMS committee reporting process
- Initial performance dashboard
- Recruitment initiative underway
- Countywide training program underway
- Grant pipeline established
- Apparatus/equipment priority assessment
- Recommendations for the next 9 months

24-Month Roadmap

MONTHS 6-9 - Build the Foundation

Priorities

- Implement regular Countywide and regional training.
- Establish consistent medical-response refresher training in coordination with EMS.
- Implement recruitment initiatives.
- Begin coordinating the pursuit of priority grants with VFD and Municipal fire chiefs.
- Develop voluntary common SOP/SOG frameworks for areas requiring interoperability.
- Improve mutual-aid and communications procedures.
- Develop a comprehensive apparatus replacement and capital-needs forecast.
- Establish baseline performance reporting.
- Develop recommendations addressing daytime staffing and response gaps.
- Begin providing recommendations on common equipment purchases.

Expected Outcome

A functioning Countywide coordination structure with regular training, communication, performance monitoring, and collaborative planning.

MONTHS 9-12 - Standardize, Strengthen & Demonstrate Results

Priorities

- Evaluate results from recruitment and retention initiatives.
- Measure participation and effectiveness of shared training.
- Implement priority interoperability improvements.
- Expand joint purchasing and shared-resource opportunities.
- Develop long-term apparatus and equipment replacement priorities.
- Improve grant application coordination and administration.
- Evaluate response performance and identify geographic or staffing gaps.
- Work with departments and municipal partners to strengthen mutual-aid arrangements.
- Begin developing service expectations for VFD funding contracts.
- Produce the first annual Countywide fire-service report to include but not limited to status on transition to identified situs-based funding, County Fire Marshal/Coordinator or Fire Chief performance, defined service zones, County's adoption of fire department recognition act.

Expected Outcome

By the end of Year 1, Sumner County should have a documented understanding of its volunteer fire capabilities, needs, gaps, costs, performance, and priorities, along with an established mechanism for addressing them collectively. VFD service contracts tied to funding and a fire department recognition resolution should also be drafted.

MONTHS 13-18 - Optimize the System

Priorities

- Refine deployment and mutual-aid practices based on first-year performance data.
- Address persistent daytime staffing and response gaps.
- Expand recruitment partnerships and volunteer pipelines.
- Evaluate opportunities for shared specialized equipment.
- Evaluate SOP/SOG alignment where interoperability benefits exist.
- Implement coordinated capital planning.
- Expand multi-department and municipal training exercises.
- Evaluate whether County funding is producing measurable improvements in readiness and service.
- Identify opportunities to reduce unnecessary duplication of equipment or services.
- Document succession planning and leadership development within the VFD system.

Expected Outcome

County fire-service decisions increasingly shift from individual requests and short-term reactions to coordinated planning based on demonstrated needs and measurable results.

MONTHS 19-24 - Institutionalize & Plan Forward

Priorities

- Conduct a comprehensive two-year review of fire-service capabilities and progress.
- Measure changes in volunteer recruitment and retention, staffing availability, training participation, response
- capability, mutual-aid utilization, equipment readiness, grant funding obtained, and County investment.
- Update the Countywide apparatus and capital plan.
- Update staffing and coverage assessments.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the Fire Coordinator position and Fire Subcommittee structure.
- Identify unresolved service gaps and emerging risks.
- Establish the next three-to-five-year strategic priorities for volunteer fire services.
- Present a Two-Year State of the Fire Service Report to the HEMS committee.

Expected Outcome

A sustainable framework for continuous improvement, accountability, and long-range fire-service planning. Implementation of service contracts under the established County fire department.

Measures of Success/Strategic Outcomes

- **Readiness:** Are departments better prepared to respond?
- **Staffing:** Is volunteer availability and recruitment improving?
- **Training:** Are firefighters receiving more frequent, relevant, and coordinated training?
- **Coordination:** Are departments working together more effectively? Are there measurable financial efficiencies gained?
- **Interoperability:** Can departments operate together safely and consistently?
- **Resources:** Are equipment, apparatus, grants, and County funds being deployed strategically?
- **Accountability:** Can County leadership clearly understand what taxpayers are supporting and what fire-service capabilities those investments provide?
- **Sustainability:** Is Sumner County building a volunteer fire-service model capable of meeting future growth and emergency response demands?

Guiding Principle

Coordinate where coordination adds value. Standardize where interoperability and safety require it. Preserve local independence where local control remains appropriate.

Sumner County Fire Marshal/Coordinator JBA

Introduction

Sumner County, Tennessee is seeking an experienced fire service professional to improve and coordinate fire protection activities and services for the citizens residing within the County's unincorporated areas. This position will be under the administrative direction of the County Mayor's office - providing planning, guidance and recommendations to the Sumner County Health and Emergency Services Committee, and administrative support for fire protection services within the unincorporated areas of Sumner County. **This position is strictly an administrative position and has no authority over operational emergency response functions**.

Qualifications

- Minimum 10 years of progressive leadership/management responsibility in fire service, with minimum of 5 years working within volunteer fire department
- Firefighter 1 & 2 certifications
- Current Fire Officer 1 certification with Fire Officer 2 certification preferred
- Experience in fire department administrative functions
- Experience in fire department emergency operations
- Fire inspection 1 certification within 12 months of employment
- US citizen
- Valid state issued driver's license
- High School diploma or equivalent
- Any combination of education, certifications, and experience that encompasses or relates to the above qualifications

Job Description

- Develop and maintain close working relationship with all of Sumner County's Volunteer Fire departments (VFDs), Emergency Management Agency (EMA), Emergency Medical Service (EMS), and Emergency Communications Center (ECC)
- Administratively coordinate support and planning activities of the VFDs including but not limited to:
    1. Accessing and strategic planning of operational and equipment needs
    2. Evaluation of station placement and staffing solutions to achieve optimal coverage
    3. Verification of current certificates, insurances, aid agreements and required reporting under Tennessee State Law
    4. Facilitate ISO audit improvement strategies

- Explore, coordinate and aid with grant proposals
- Identify opportunities and make recommendations for standardized tools, equipment and supplies while leveraging economies of scale to include but not limited to:
    1. Common tools, equipment and supplies
    2. Reporting and notification software
    3. Group insurance
    4. Grant viability
- Develop uniform reporting and accounting policies to reinforce taxpayer transparency and fiscal accountability
- Administer standard personnel alert/messaging and call data collection systems for volunteer response within the unincorporated areas of Sumner County
- Coordinate minimum levels of training and competency for all volunteer personnel and administer uniform methods for tracking and reporting
- Analyze and establish optimal dispatch and response procedures
- Represent rural fire protection on ECC committee
- Coordinate programs and initiatives for recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighting staff
- Analyze the need for fire prevention education
    1. Analyze fire trends within jurisdiction and create aggressive public education program to decrease the occurrence of injury, death, and/or loss of property from fire.
    2. Evaluate current County rules and regulations regarding fire-related issues and make recommendations to accurately address these issues to the appropriate County body/function
- Assist chiefs as needed with fire investigations in the unincorporated areas of Sumner County
- Fire Inspections

Work with building and codes department to ensure all plans are in compliance with adopted fire codes and include adequate fire department access, adequate water supply access and fire flows, developing a unified correction list of deficiencies in pre-construction plans.

Sumner County Fire Marshal/Coordinator Quantitative Measures of Success - Proposed Performance Scorecard and Measurement Framework

Purpose

The strategic outcome questions remain useful, but they should be supported by objective measures that allow the Fire Marshal/Coordinator, Fire Subcommittee, HEMS Committee and County Commission to determine whether fire-service capability is measurably improving.

The recommended approach is to establish reliable baselines during the first 180 days, validate the data, recommend targets, obtain committee approval, and then report performance quarterly.

Proposed Quantitative Scorecard

Area	KPI	What We Measure	Initial Target
Readiness	Response Coverage	% of incidents meeting an adopted response-time/service standard	Baseline by Day 180, then annual improvement target
Readiness	Apparatus Readiness	% of frontline apparatus available for service	≥ 95%
Readiness	Mutual-Aid Dependency	% of incidents requiring mutual aid, by department and incident type	Baseline and trend
Staffing	Active Operational Members	Number of active, response-qualified members by VFD	Net annual increase
Staffing	Daytime Availability	Average qualified personnel available during defined daytime hours	Baseline + annual improvement
Staffing	Personnel on Scene	Average/median qualified personnel arriving within defined time intervals	Quarterly improvement
Staffing	Volunteer Retention	% of active members retained year over year	≥ 85%
Training	Training Participation	% of active members completing required/priority training	≥ 90%
Training	Joint Training	Number of multi-department training exercises	≥ 1 quarterly
Training	Medical Refresher Training	% of applicable personnel completing scheduled medical-response refreshers	≥ 90%

Coordination	Chiefs Participation	% of VFDs represented at coordination meetings	≥ 90%
Coordination	Joint Activities	Number of training, grant, purchasing, or operational initiatives involving multiple departments	Track quarterly
Interoperability	Common Procedures	% of identified priority operational areas with agreed interoperable procedures	100% of priorities by Month 24
Interoperability	Exercise Performance	Identified deficiencies corrected following multi-department exercises	≥ 90% by established deadline
Resources	Grant Performance	Grant dollars applied for and awarded	Track $ applied / $ awarded
Resources	Cooperative Savings	Documented savings from joint purchasing/shared resources	Track annual $ savings
Resources	Capital Planning	% of major apparatus / equipment included in documented replacement forecast	100% by Month 12
Accountability	Data Reporting	% of VFDs submitting required performance information on time	≥ 95%
Accountability	Reporting	Coordinator reports delivered to HEMS Committee as scheduled	100%
Accountability	Corrective Actions	% of identified action items completed by assigned deadline	≥ 90%
Sustainability	Volunteer Pipeline	New applicants to qualified active members conversion rate	Establish baseline + improve annually
Sustainability	Staffing Risk	Number of stations / departments below an adopted minimum staffing capability	Reduce annually
Sustainability	Capital Exposure	$ value of apparatus / equipment beyond planned replacement age	Reduce annually

Higher-Level Measures

1. Response Capability Index

Measure the percentage of calls that received the personnel, apparatus, and response time appropriate for the incident. This avoids relying on response time alone when adequate personnel or equipment may arrive later.

2. Volunteer Capacity

Track the complete volunteer funnel: **Applicants** → **Accepted** → **Trained** → **Response Qualified** → **Active at 12 Months** → **Active at 24 Months.** This shows whether recruitment activity is actually producing and retaining operational firefighters.

3. County Investment Performance

For County fire-service investment, document the connection between **County Funding** → **Staffing / Training / Apparatus / Equipment** → **Capability** → **Measured Result.** This creates a clear accountability structure for future funding decisions.

Target-Setting Approach

The numerical targets shown in this document are proposed management targets, not verified Sumner County standards. Formal targets should be adopted only after reliable local baseline data is established and applicable standards are reviewed.

Recommended sequence: Baseline → Validate Data → Recommend Target → HEMS committee Approval → Measure Quarterly

Examples of Future Results Reporting

Once baselines and targets are established, reporting should quantify changes rather than simply describe progress.

Examples* of the desired reporting format include:

- Daytime personnel availability increased 18%.
- Qualified active membership increased 12%.
- Training compliance increased from 71% to 91%.
- Apparatus out-of-service hours decreased 22%.
- 94% of priority incidents met the adopted response capability standard.
- Joint purchasing avoided $48,000 in expenditures.
- Grant awards generated $3.40 for every $1 of County grant-support expense.

***Important: The figures above are illustrative examples only. They are not actual Sumner County results.**

Performance Philosophy

The goal is to move the Fire Marshal/Coordinator's performance assessment from “Are we doing better?” to “Show us exactly how much better, where, and compared with what baseline.”

Fire Marshal / Coordinator - Compensation Market Analysis and Salary Justification

Recommended Salary Range	**$95,000 - $115,000**
Target Hiring Range	**$100,000 - $105,000**

Purpose

This analysis provides market support for the proposed Sumner County Fire Marshal / Coordinator compensation. The position should be evaluated as a senior public-safety leadership and countywide coordination role, not as a routine fire inspector or line-level firefighter position. The recommended range reflects comparable Tennessee Fire Marshal positions, nearby county positions, Sumner County internal public-safety leadership compensation, and the experience and certifications required by the proposed job description.

Role Requirements and Scope

The proposed job description requires a minimum of 10 years of progressive fire-service leadership/management responsibility, including at least five years working within a volunteer fire department; Firefighter I and II certifications; Fire Officer I with Fire Officer II preferred; administrative and emergency-operations experience; and Fire Inspector I certification within 12 months of employment.

- Countywide coordination and planning among VFDs, EMA, EMS, ECC, Building & Codes, and county leadership.
- Staffing and station-placement analysis, equipment and capital planning, grant coordination, and ISO improvement strategies.
- Training and competency coordination, dispatch and response analysis, recruitment and retention initiatives, fire-prevention education, inspections, and investigation support.
- Standardized reporting, fiscal-accountability practices, and data systems needed to measure service performance and inform future funding decisions.

Tennessee Statutory Baseline

Tennessee Code Annotated § 5-6-121 authorizes a County Mayor to appoint a County Fire Marshal. The statute assigns the role responsibility for coordinating volunteer fire departments, enforcing local fire-safety regulations, and assisting in fire and arson prevention. The statutory minimum requires at least five years of firefighter experience and State Fire Marshal certification. The Sumner County proposal intentionally requires substantially more leadership and volunteer-fire experience than this statutory floor.

Comparable Position	Salary / Range	Relevance
Wilson County, TN Assistant Fire Marshal	$79,144 – $83,400	Nearby county benchmark; reports to Fire Marshal and has a narrower prevention / code-enforcement scope.
Bartlett, TN Fire Marshal	$92,486 - $106,924	Current Tennessee Fire Marshal benchmark with plans review, inspections, investigations and public education.
Sumner County EMA Director (FY2026)	$113,311 budgeted salary	Strong internal public-safety leadership comparator within the same county employment and benefits structure.
Sumner County EMS Deputy Chiefs (FY2026)	$118,371 budgeted salary	Internal county emergency-service command benchmark.
Sumner County EMS Assistant Chief (FY2026)	$127,920 budgeted salary	Upper internal emergency-service leadership benchmark.

Market Interpretation

The market evidence supports a practical compensation band centered near $100,000. Positions in the high $60,000s and $70,000s are more consistent with assistant-level Fire Marshal roles. Full Fire Marshal and senior public-safety leadership positions move into the $90,000-to-$120,000-plus range. Because the proposed Sumner County position combines Fire Marshal responsibilities with countywide volunteer-fire coordination, strategic planning, data and performance management, grants, training, capital planning, and future service-contract administration, compensation materially below $95,000 would risk pricing the position below the level of responsibility and experience being required.

Recommended Compensation Structure

Level	Recommended Amount	Rationale
Minimum	$95,000	Competitive entry point for a candidate meeting the required 10 years of leadership experience and core certifications.
Target Range	$100,000 - $105,000	Appropriate target for a strong candidate with substantial volunteer-fire leadership, administrative, operational, inspection, grant, or ISO experience.
Maximum	$115,000	Provides flexibility for an exceptional candidate while remaining generally aligned with senior county emergency services compensation.

Phase 2 Consideration

The compensation case is strengthened by the contemplated evolution of the position. Under the recommendation, the Fire Marshal / Coordinator is intended to build the countywide planning, accountability and performance framework that supports a later contracted fire-service model. The role is therefore being recruited not only for today's administrative duties, but for the capability to manage a more mature county fire-service structure as implementation progresses.

Compensation Conclusion

A salary range of $95,000 to $115,000, with a target hiring range of $100,000 to $105,000, is supported by the available Tennessee market data and Sumner County's own public-safety compensation structure. This range recognizes the unusually broad scope of the position, the 10-year leadership requirement, the need for volunteer-fire experience, and the strategic importance of establishing countywide coordination and accountability.

Sumner County Fire Services Subcommittee

Purpose Statement

The Subcommittee is intended to provide continuity, collaboration, and informed guidance on fire service issues while preserving the operational authority and independence of the County's individual volunteer fire departments.

The Subcommittee will serve as a collaborative forum for County government, volunteer fire departments, municipalities, and other public safety partners to identify needs, evaluate challenges, and develop recommendations that strengthen the safety, sustainability, effectiveness, and accountability of fire services throughout the County.

This Subcommittee shall make itself available to assist the Mayor's office in identifying and vetting appropriate candidates for the position of Sumner County Fire Marshal/Coordinator and shall continue in an advisory capacity for that position as well as the HEMS committee.

Committee Membership

Seven-member subcommittee:

- Fire Marshal/Coordinator
- 3 County Commissioners
- 1 VFD Fire Chief
- 2 Citizens

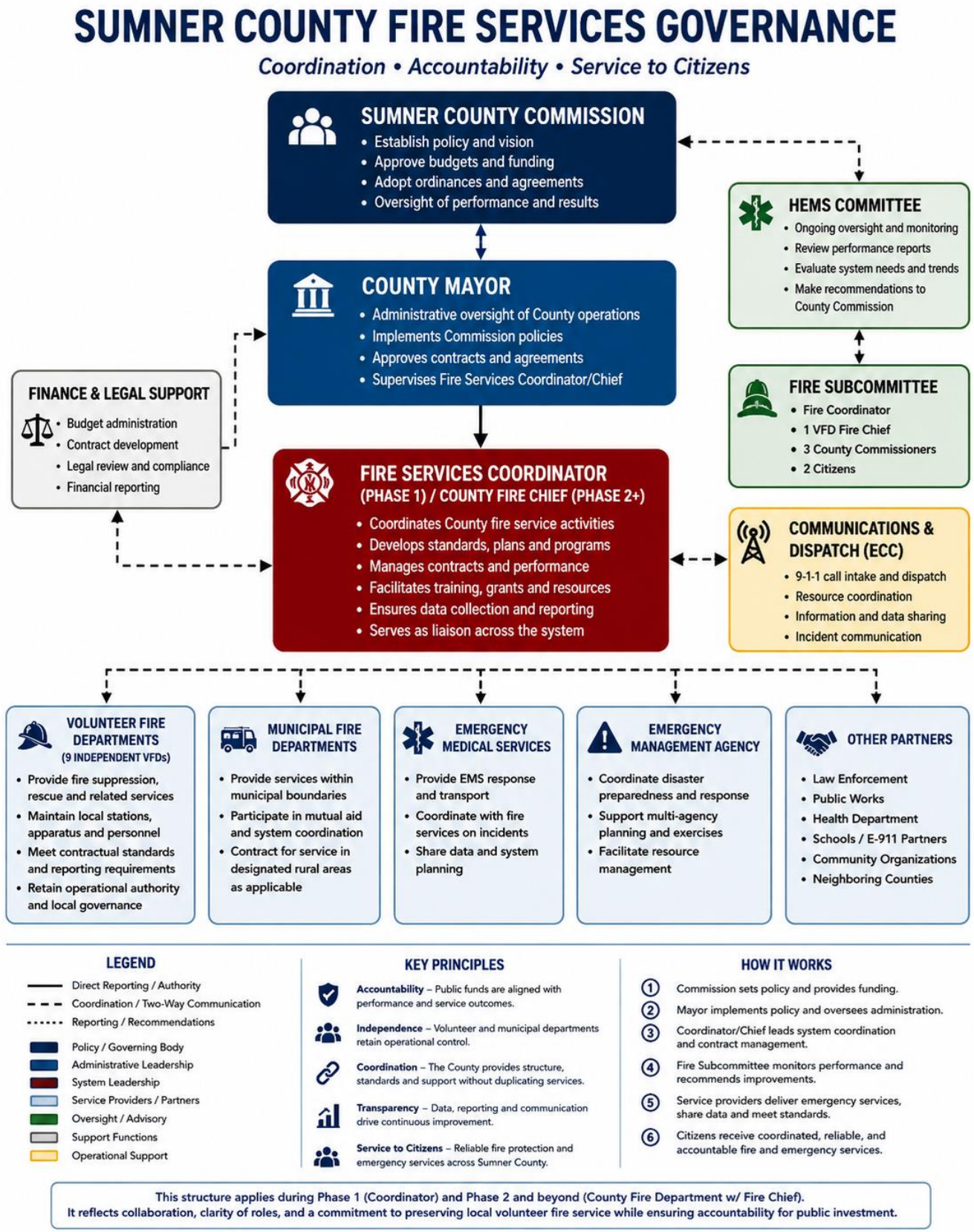
The Subcommittee's work may include:

- Advise and assist the Mayor's office with advertising the position of Fire Marshal/Coordinator, as well as vetting and interviewing applicants.
- Continue to serve in an advisory role for HEMS and Fire Marshal/Coordinator.
- Review progress of roadmap and provide recommendations for roadblocks.

Mission Statement

The mission of the Sumner County Fire Services Subcommittee is to assist in unifying and supporting the nine volunteer fire departments to ensure seamless emergency response in the unincorporated areas of Sumner County. Through strategic leadership, shared resource management, and standardized training coordination, we maximize community protection, support our volunteer personnel, and safeguard lives and property across Sumner County.

Sumer County Fire Service Governance



Population Growth and Development Pressure

Why it matters

Unincorporated Sumner County Data points support long-term fire-service planning. Population growth is not simply a countywide planning issue. Growth in the unincorporated area directly affects the territory primarily served by Sumner County's VFDs. **From 2021-2025 VFD call volume increased 15.4%**. More residents and development increase the population exposed to emergency response demand while staffing, apparatus, station placement, training, and capital needs must adapt to changing service conditions.

Key population data points

Measure	Population	What it shows
2000 unincorporated population	42,817	Historical Census-based benchmark
2010 unincorporated population	48,499	+5,682 residents, or +13.3%, from 2000
2023 GNRC model base	60,655	More recent regional planning estimate
2035 GNRC forecast	67,948	+7,293 residents, or +12.0% from 2023 model base
2050 GNRC forecast	75,365	+14,710 residents, or +24.3%, from 2023 model base

Historical data show the unincorporated population increased from 42,817 in 2000 to 48,499 in 2010, an increase of 5,682 residents, or 13.3%. A newer Greater Nashville Regional Council (GNCR) planning model uses a 2023 base of 60,655 residents and forecasts approximately 75,365 residents by 2050, an increase of nearly 14,710 residents, or 24.3% over the forecast period.

Planning forecasts show continued pressure with an earlier Sumner County planning forecast projected unincorporated population of 47,215 in 2017, 54,093 by 2025, 70,956 by 2035, and 88,968 by 2045. That forecast is more aggressive than the newer GNRC model. **The important point is that both planning scenarios anticipate continued growth in the unincorporated service area**.

Broader county trend

The broader county trend supports the direction of the unincorporated forecasts. Sumner County grew from 160,645 residents in the 2010 Census to 196,281 in the 2020 Census, an increase of 22.2%. The U.S. Census Bureau's 2025 population estimate is 215,538, approximately 9.8% above the 2020 estimates base.

More residents + more development + an aging fire-service infrastructure = increasing pressure on rural emergency-response capacity.

VFD Budget Reporting Template

Financials for Fiscal Year July 1, 20 - June 30, 20

VFD Name:
Station Name:
Physical Address:

Income

Total Revenue:		**$**
Private Donations:	$	
Membership Dues:	$	
Services & Fees:	$	
County Funding:	$	
Grants:	$	
City Funding:	$	

Expenses

Facility (Recurring)

Total Insurance:		**$**
Workman's Comp:	$	
Vehicle:	$	
Portable Equipment:	$	
Building:	$	
Contents:	$	
General Liability:	$	
Auto Liability:	$	
Management Liability:	$	
Accident & Sickness:	$	
LOSAP Awards Program:	$	
Total Utilities:		**$**
Electric:	$	
Natural Gas:	$	
Propane:	$	
Water:	$	
Sewer:	$	
Trash:	$	
Internet:	$	
Telephone:	$	
Diesel Fuel:	$	
Gasoline Fuel:	$	
Total Communication Equipment & Services:		**$**
Dispatching Service:	$	
Radio System:	$	
Total Business Costs:		**$**
Accounting Fees:	$	
Office Supplies/Postage:	$	
Dues & Subscriptions:	$	
Professional Fees & Permits:	$	
Fundraising Expense:	$	
Fire Prevention Week:	$	
Total Employee Compensation:		**$**
Chief:	$	
Total Firefighting Training:		**$**
Class Fees:	$	
Training Materials:	$	
Travel:	$	
Travel Rooms:	$	
Travel Meals:	$	
Total Firefighting:		**$**
Travel:	$	
Travel Rooms:	$	
Travel Meals:	$	
Total Personal Protective Equipment:		**$**
Gloves:	$	
Helmets:	$	
Jacket:	$	
Boots:	$	
Pants:	$	
Masks:	$	
Nomex:	$	

Facility (Capital)

Facility Repairs & Upgrades:		**$**
OSHA Required Test:	$	
Replaced Cabinets:	$	
Slurry Seal Parking Lot:	$	
Replaced A/C Unit:	$	
Replaced Kitchen Flooring:	$	
Fire Engine Replacement Fund:	$	

Equipment Repairs

Total Vehicle & Equipment Repairs:		**$**
Primary Pump Engine:	$	
Primary Tanker Truck:	$	
Primary Brush Truck:	$	
Rescue Pumper:	$	
First Responder Truck:	$	
All Other Equipment:	$	

Equipment

Equipment	Make (MFR.)	Model Number	Year Built	Miles Hours	Current Value	Replacement Value
Primary Equipment						
Primary Pump Engine:					$	$
Primary Tanker Truck:					$	$
Primary Brush Truck:					$	$
Rescue Pumper:					$	$
First Responder Truck:					$	$
Other Equipment						
					$	$
					$	$
					$	$
					$	$
					$	$
					$	$
					$	$
					$	$

VFD Budget Guidelines