



STRATEGIC PLAN

Portage Public Safety – Fire Division

Mission Statement

To increase survivability of life and property threatened by hostile environments, circumstances and events.

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Background

The City of Portage is located in southwest Michigan approximately halfway between the cities of Chicago and Detroit. The city is comprised of 34.5 square miles, relatively flat landscape and moderately wooded community. The north side of the city is bordered by the City of Kalamazoo, the west side by Texas Township, the south side by South Kalamazoo County Fire Authority, and the east side by Pavilion Township. Population estimates for 2014 show Portage having a population of 45,675.

Portage Township was organized in 1838 with approximately 20 families occupying the area. By 1940, with the population now at over 8,000 residents, the township's board recognized a need for an official fire protection service and budgeted \$8,000 for a new fire station and fire engine. Ernest Hall was appointed the first fire chief, a position he held from May 1, 1941 to April 25, 1942. He had 25 volunteers and a 1941 Ford fire engine at his disposal. On April 28, 1942, Jacob Mein took over as chief, a position he held for 35 years.

In response to an annexation attempt by the City of Kalamazoo in February 1962, Portage Township residents petitioned for incorporation as a city. The old township officially became a city on December 31, 1963. At that time there were only 5,102 residential, 750 multi-family, and 290 commercial parcels.

Station History:

Current Station 1: Originally built in 1941 at 7720 S. Westnedge and replaced with current building that was built directly across the street in 1984 at 7830 S. Westnedge Avenue.

Current Station 2: Originally built in 1959 at 118 W. Van Hoesen and replaced by the current station built in 1976 at 6101 Oakland Drive. 2015-16 Capital Improvement Program (CIP) has an evaluation for recommendation of a rebuild or refurbishment of existing building.

Current Station 3: Originally built in 1961 at 3300 E. Centre and replaced by the current station built in 1994 at 8503 Sprinkle Road.

The first fire station was completed for \$5,000 in 1941 at 7720 S. Westnedge Avenue on what is now the northwest corner of Portage Central Cemetery. During those early years, the fire station also served as the Township office and housing for the chief and his family. A commemorative marker now identifies the location of the former station. The current Station 1, built in 1984 is located across the street from the first fire station.

A second fire station was approved by the township in 1959 and subsequently constructed at 118 West Van Hoesen, on the SW corner of West Van Hoesen and Vermont. It was a small, double-bay facility with living quarters for housing on-duty firemen. Living quarters were built in the attic which was plagued by temperature extremes. The living quarters were later moved into the open area on ground level, directly behind the apparatus. A 7,500 square foot replacement Station #2 was completed in 1976 at 6101 Oakland Drive costing \$365,000. The old station was used to store City equipment for a while, then sold to Wedel's Nursery where it was used as a small warehouse for their supplies. It was torn down in 2002 for construction of a commercial/retail area.

In 1961 the department added a third fire station located at 3300 E. Centre Avenue. This station was the smallest of the three, occupying 2600 square feet of space and cost \$7,000 to build. It was replaced on April 26, 1994 with a new 7,600 square foot facility at 8503 Sprinkle Road at a cost of \$602,200.

The City of Portage Department of Public Safety - Fire Division employs 41 firefighters consisting of 30 career and 11 paid on-call, plus 2 civilian employees. The department operates three shifts from three stations and responds to all fire, EMS, hazardous materials, and technical rescue emergencies. Sixty-two percent of calls for service are medically related. This includes but is not limited to; household medical calls, extrications, technical rescues, cardiac arrest, etc. Structure fires continue to remain low at just three percent, however engine responses continue to be required on over fifty-five percent of all calls.

Previous Reports

In 1975, Rolf Jensen & Associates, Inc., was selected by the City of Portage to provide a Fire Department Master Plan as a result of a significant fire at a local commercial occupancy and the concern by citizens, fire department personnel, and some council members that the fire protection may need to be enhanced. The procedures used for this report were to assess existing conditions, available resources, future growth in the community and revenue potential. The following is an excerpt from this study with their summary of recommendations over a period of five years:

- Add operations personnel
- Reorganize Fire Department, including adding administrative assistant position
- Additional equipment

- Creation of a Training Officer
- Creation of a Fire Inspector
- Adoption of a fire code
- Construction and relocation of stations
- Central Emergency Communications and Dispatching Facility
- Creation of a second Fire Inspector

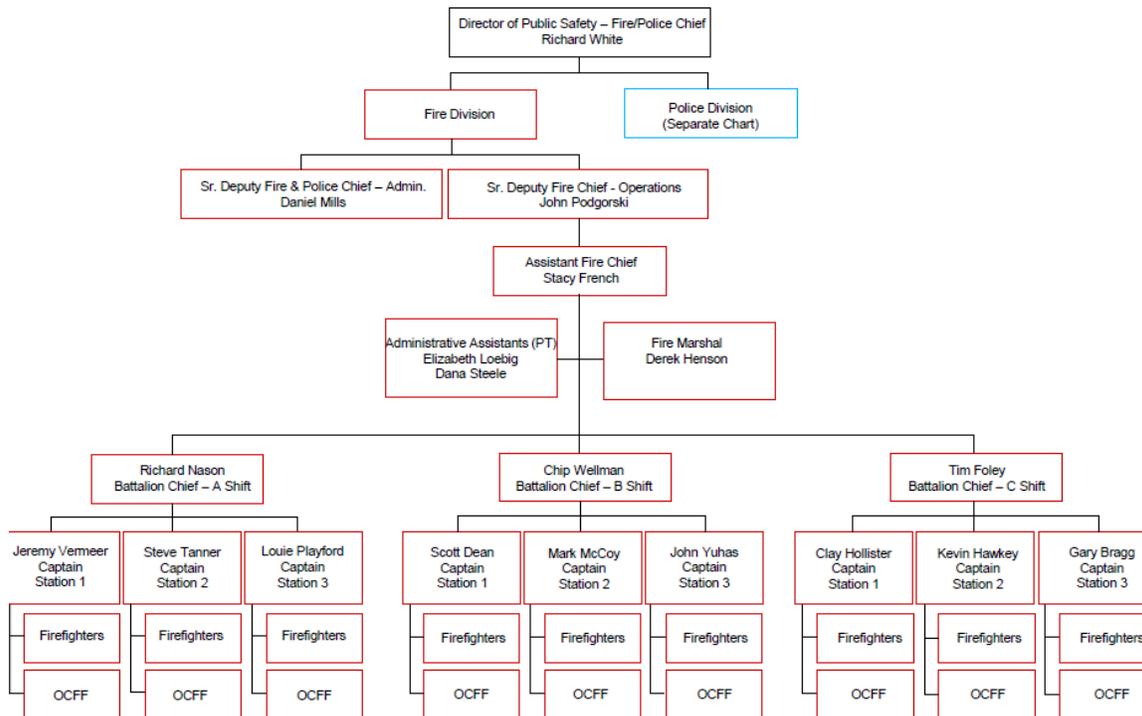
Insurance Service Office (ISO)

There have been several ISO studies performed over the years for the City of Portage. In 1980, the ISO rating was five out of nine, a five for most of the city with good water service and a nine for those areas of the city that did not have city water and hydrants. This was increased to the rating of a four out of nine in 1997 due to improvements made in general water supply in the city and fire department equipment. The last inspection in May of 2012, maintained a rating of four out of nine. Several key items, as follows, were identified that would allow for improvement of that rating.

- Improve distribution of resources to allow for quicker response to emergencies (only fifty percent of the four available points)
- Additional personnel (only twenty-six percent of the fifteen available points)
- Additional training opportunities (only forty percent of the nine available points)

Portage Fire Division

January 2015



Stakeholder-Driven Strategic Plan

Expectations of the fire and emergency services have rapidly grown over the past fifty years from primarily performing fire suppression, to a point of providing services in EMS, hazmat, technical rescue, fire code enforcement and public fire/life safety education. At the same time, public policy environments have evolved and typically are characterized by the complex interactions of politics, economics, demographics, geography and sociology. These trends require fire service managers to evaluate not only the efficiencies that can be achieved through modifying delivery systems, but must further assess the effectiveness of those changes as a whole on the system and how they affect the various users.

According to Webster's New College Dictionary, a stakeholder is: *....a person or group having a stake, or interest, in the success of an enterprise, business, movement, etc.*

Our department identifies the following groups as stakeholders.

- Fire and EMS personnel
- Department/Agency/Organization
- Citizens of the community
- Local elected officials and community leaders
- Business owners within the community

To ensure community expectations were part of this strategic plan, a community-driven strategic planning process was utilized to guide the development of the department's strategic plan. This process utilized a combination of feedback mechanism's including; the City's Vision 2025 session and customer feedback cards.

Departments Strategic Plan

This strategic plan sets forth a comprehensive plan to assist the Fire Division in complying with the vision of the city and maintaining its mission for the citizens of Portage. The department utilizes a six-step approach in the development of this strategic plan. Input for such a plan must encompass both external as well as internal stakeholder involvement.

Six Elements of the Strategic Plan

1. Vision and Mission – Vision is a brief statement describing direction and growth plans. The Mission Statement is a description of the desired services to be provided based on customer needs
2. Critical Success Factors – A description of those items that must be addressed in order to achieve the vision and mission statement. These will be used to determine how success is measured in the evaluation process.
3. Strategies – An approach, process and/or plan describing a set of tasks that need to be accomplished in order to achieve a desired goal.
4. Goals and SMART Objectives –SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time) objectives are used to
5. Prioritized Implementation Schedule – A list of those goals and objectives that need to be accomplished in order of priority, commonly referred to as an action plan.
6. Evaluation Process – With any successful strategic plan there must be a method that is developed along with tools that are employed, to measure progress towards the implementation of the strategic plan. Outcomes are then assessed to allow for modification of any or all of the previously listed steps, making this a continuous improvement model.

This strategic plan sets forth a comprehensive plan to assist the Fire Division in complying with the vision of the city and maintaining its mission for the citizens of Portage. The following pages provide goals, objectives and strategies to meet the vision of this community.

Vision and Mission

The city's vision statement in conjunction with the department's mission statement, provided the foundation in the development of this strategic plan. The Portage 2020 Vision, found in the 2025 Portage Visioning Project of 2007 stated, *The City of Portage will be a world class community where the needs of its diverse population will be met through coordinated efforts of city, county and regional services.* To build upon that vision, seven key topic areas were further broken down. One of those areas is Municipal Services, which had its own Vision Statement and associated goals. The Vision Statement stated, *Portage shall be a leading-edge city providing equitable state-of-the-art municipal services that ensure the highest quality of living and outstanding economic opportunities.*

The mission of the Fire Division is, *to increase survivability of life and property threatened by hostile environments, circumstances and events.* This simple but encompassing statement provides clear direction on the mission of this department and how it supports the vision of the city.

Critical Success Factors

Critical success factors refer to specific activities, procedures or areas that the organization depend on for its continued survival. In terms of Portage, as outlined in the City's vision statement, and incorporating in the Fire Division's mission statement, the critical factors to support both are; providing adequate resources in a timely fashion to mitigate the emergency situation in a timely manner. Critical factors would include but are not limited to:

- An Effective Response Force (ERF) of 13 personnel within 14 minutes of incident notification
- Water supply system capable of providing adequate supply as directed by operation, either by water mains & hydrants or water shuttle supplied by neighboring communities
- Equipment to support fire ground operations including appropriate number of aerials and engines.
- Resources distributed in a way to support effective response times for emergent calls for service.

Strategies

Several areas of improvement have been identified in the self-assessment phase of this project. Areas of improvement along with the designed strategy that will be implemented for improvement is provided in the section of recommendations.

Goals and SMART Objectives

Some of the goals of this topic specifically towards public safety were:

- Continuously enhance excellent delivery of police, fire and EMS services as the city grows.
- Continue to be an active participant in local and regional government leadership and cooperation to deliver better services to our community. Portage will be a leader in fostering intergovernmental cooperation.
- Maintain and improve municipal services as the city grows and provide capital assets to ensure the highest standard of municipal services.

Stakeholders

Stakeholders for the City of Portage are broken into two classifications; external and internal stakeholders. External stakeholders represent the Portage City Council, citizens of the community, commercial occupants within the city and developers working within the City of Portage. Internal stakeholders typically are referring to those members of the Fire Division.

External Stakeholders (excerpts from the Vision 2025 Final Report)

The Portage City Council, as part of their 2006 Goals and Objectives, identified the importance of conducting a community visioning project. The process of developing and articulating a shared vision of the future is the first step needed in order for a community to build and sustain success. Portage 2025 will serve as the framework for identifying and accomplishing future city goals.

Following a series of community-wide announcements in the *Portager* monthly newsletter, the City of Portage website, local media and presentations to local organizations, Portage residents were invited to submit applications to participate in Portage 2025. Over 150 individuals signed-up to participate and 133 residents participated in the first forum held on January 17, 2007. The participants represented a diverse cross-segment of Portage including all ages from high school students to senior citizens, all types of professional experience and all types of civic involvement from three past Mayors to those participating in local government for the first time. Those residents that wanted to attend but couldn't, could follow the process by watching rebroadcast forum sessions on three separate occasions throughout the week and provide input to the

process by writing comments on the City of Portage web blog which could be accessed from the Portage website.

The City retained the services of Dams & Associates to plan and facilitate the visioning process, while several council members and city administrators served as the Steering Committee for this project. One of the key considerations of the Steering Committee in designing the process was to have a citizen-based process, where the participants took leadership and ownership in developing the visions and goals. One of the other key considerations was to build on the previous Portage visioning process that was conducted in 1991, called Portage 2020. Specifically, it was determined to retain and build from the overall vision of Portage 2020.

The Portage 2020 Vision stated, *The City of Portage will be a world class community where the needs of its diverse population will be met through coordinated efforts of city, county and regional services.* To build upon that vision, seven key topic areas were further broken down, one of those being Municipal Services which had its own Vision Statement and associated goals. The Vision Statement stated, *Portage shall be a leading-edge city providing equitable state-of-the-art municipal services that ensure the highest quality of living and outstanding economic opportunities.* Some of the goals of this topic specifically towards public safety were:

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Internal Stakeholders

The internal stakeholders involvement is equally as important to the overall strategic planning process. The purpose for input from this group of personnel is to identify potential changes they would recommend to best address the vision of the city and the mission of this department, and to determine how a desired change or practice could be implemented. The department employed over four assessments with the internal stakeholders over the past three years. The following is a summary of those sessions.

SWOT Analysis 2013

A Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis was performed for the department in 2013. Input for this analysis was provided via e-mail from members of the Fire Division. The following is a summary of those findings.

Strengths

- Solid group of personnel within the division
- Equipment is well-maintained
- Strong fire prevention program and code enforcement
- High quality dispatching
- Strong working relationship with local police and surrounding fire departments

Weaknesses

- Senior members of department are starting to retire leaving a void in “work experience”

- Loss of dedicated Training Officer
- Lack in access to training facility with live burn and fire stream capabilities
- On-call system is weaker than in previous years

Opportunities

- Increase outside training opportunities to increase knowledge, skills and abilities to counter the loss of work experience.
- More involvement with other local fire departments in joint purchases and training
- Regionalization of specialty teams
- Accreditation process

Threats

- Members are uncertain on the direction of the department
- Loss of revenue to the City of Portage

Prioritized Implementation Schedule

It is not feasible or effective to implement all changes at the same time. Each of the recommended changes is prioritized to ensure those items of most importance are addressed in a more timely manner. The implementation schedule can be found below under the section of recommendations.

Evaluation Process

The evaluation process is more than assessing whether a particular item has improved, but also looks at how those changes effected other components of the organization. Although shown at the end of the strategic plan, this phase of the process is

never ending and can be incorporated at any point of the process. Adequate measurement tools must be developed to provide consistency and accuracy as to the results that are obtained.

Recommendations

The Department recognizes that opportunities for improvement in service and delivery do exist. The following recommendations are meant to provide improvements in the development of the standard of cover. It is expected that the information obtained and produced in this strategic plan will in turn, provide the necessary information to assist in making informed decisions on changes that may need to take place. The following are the current recommendations as a result of completing this strategic plan.

1. ***Incident Times.*** The Department currently utilizes time data generated from the AS 400 system currently used by our dispatch center. In reviewing the data for the SOC it became apparent that incident times were not entered consistently, resulting in skewed incident times. A method should be developed that will ensure incident data entered for incidents is validated. Assessment has identified that due to geographical obstructions and distance between stations, there are several areas of the city that do not meet the required response times as described in the SOC. Additional studies should be performed to improve response times to these locations
 - a. **Critical Task – Accurate Data (Timeline 6 months)**
 - i. Implement a method that will ensure incident data entered for incidents is validated.

- ii. Research software and hardware that would assist in providing accurate data for incident response times.

b. **Critical Task – Response Times (Timeline 36 months)**

- i. Implement procedures and methods to reduce response times

2. **Organization risk assessment.** The Department has established a process that defines a process to establish risk for business occupancies within the city. Once the process was established, the department assigned a level of risk; low, medium, high, or special to each commercial occupancy in the city. Although the basic assessment provides some good guidelines, there continues to be some concern associated with particular occupancies in the city. The process should incorporate all aspects of identifying and evaluating risk.

a. **Critical Task – Assess Occupancy Risk (Timeline 36 months)**

- i. Continue working with community development to better identify high risks occupancy/structures within the City of Portage
- ii. Identify those conditions that would reduce the risk within those occupancy/structures.
- iii. Implement a plan to modify codes and ordinances to assist with changes noted in section ii.
- iv. Develop an annual appraisal system to oversee changes or needs within the community.

3. **Professional Development.** Implement a training program for career development and succession planning. Due to the numerous retirements and probable future retirements of this department, a focus on general training,

including but not limited to live fire training and career development, is essential for the future growth of the organization.

a. **Critical Task – Career Development (Timeline 12 months)**

- i. Reinstate Training Officer position.
- ii. Evaluate existing programs and identify deficiencies.
- iii. Create career development programs for all positions within the department.
- iv. Identify potential funding sources to support employee development.
- v. Identify critical tasks for each position.
- vi. Develop a mentorship program.

b. **Critical Task – Internal Communication (Timeline 12 months)**

- i. Identify deficient communication practices.
- ii. Identify operations practices to improve deficiencies.
- iii. Implement plan to improve deficiencies.

4. ***Community input process.*** The department utilizes a variety of sources such as customer survey cards and the annual city survey as inputs to solicit and receive feedback from the general public. A system, however, should be developed that allows for a systematic and regular method of acquiring feedback regarding specific services and expectations that will be used for planning purposes.

a. **Critical Task – Transparency of Information (Timeline 12 months)**

- i. Identify best method to communicate department progress.

- ii. Identify best method to solicit input from external stakeholders.
- iii. Implement process to provide information and receive input from external stakeholders.
- iv. Modify annual city survey to specifically address goals and objectives of the department.

5. ***Integrate accreditation process.*** The accreditation process incorporates a system-wide self-assessment to develop a standard of cover and a strategic plan. This process provides the framework needed in order to properly assess the quality and effectiveness of the agency. In turn, this information provides a feedback mechanism to be used in the development of future planning on service delivery expectations.

a. **Critical Task – Initial and Re-Accreditation (Timeline 6 months)**

- i. Submit for initial accreditation.
- ii. Identify personnel for areas of responsibility and oversight of specific areas of the accreditation.
- iii. Develop procedures for maintaining accreditation.
- iv. Implement continuous monitoring system related to goals and objectives identified in the strategic plan.

6. ***Additional personnel resources.*** With the current level of daily staffing, the department does not have enough personnel to manage a fire incident. An assessment should be performed to identify the best practices to achieve the desired results for personnel resources in the event of the various types of emergencies as indicated in the Standard of Cover document.

a. **Critical Task – (Timeline 9 months)**

- i. Determine current and anticipated operational and administrative workload of the department.
- ii. Identify discrepancies between staffing levels, and anticipated workload.
- iii. Identify potential funding sources for additional career staffing.
- iv. Develop and submit staff report on required staffing needs.

Summary

This strategic plan is a living document that is to be maintained through monitoring and adjustments as needed to ensure the services provided by this department are in line with the desired vision of the city while maintaining the organizational mission statement of providing a high quality effective service in an efficient manner.