Hart County Fire Department Long-Term Plan
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The ultimate goal for any community is to become a safer place for its citizens. Hart County took proactive measures to ensure that goal by developing a long-term plan for the Hart County Fire Department (HCFD) with the help of the Archway Partnership.

The idea behind plan development was to identify community priorities related to fire protection and guide resource allocation. The hoped for result: Better resource allocation for overall public safety and an improved fire-protection rating, reducing insurance premiums and saving tax payers money.

In 2010, Archway Professional Ilka McConnell met with the Hart County Fire Chief and the Hart County Administrator. Soon after, an adult education doctoral student from the University of Georgia was assigned to help develop a first ever long-term plan. With the help of the Fire Chief, the Fire Board (the county’s eight elected volunteer fire station chiefs), and the Hart County Fire Department Training Officer, the student’s job was to examine cross-county facilities, assets, and personnel to help identify areas of need.

The plan started to become a reality as the team conducted a benchmark survey of volunteer departments in similarly sized communities and visited each of the eight stations in Hart County. The team identified both needs, such as equipment, and upcoming trends that would impact county fire protection. A long-term fire plan, reviewed by the Fire Board and HC Board of Commissioners, was completed in late 2010.

The project expanded in Summer 2012. With the newly documented fire plan and implementation of several fire protection enhancements, the HCFD and Hart County Government requested the Insurance Services Office (ISO) conduct a new Public Protection Classification (PPC) rating—Hart County’s first since 2001. As a result of the new review, the ISO PPC rating for residential dwellings improved from a 6/9 to a 4/9.

This PPC rating change had the potential effect of lowering property and casualty insurance premiums for many Hart County residential and commercial/industrial property owners and provided added benefit for economic-development activities. The Archway Professional worked with County Administrator Jon Caime to conduct a financial impact analysis to estimate the impact of PPC changes on homeowner’s insurance premiums for residential properties. This report was shared with the Hart County Board of Commissioners. The rough estimate of insurance premium savings for residential properties located in areas of Hart County that experienced PPC rating shifts totaled $5,250,000 per year.

Today, the HCFD is constructing two new fire stations and a new facility for one existing fire station. The construction for the facilities is being funded by SPLOST, thanks in part to the facility needs identified in this planning process.

“Our long range plan for fire is a valuable guide for our planning needs and a guide we will rely on from this point forward as we plan for the future,” says Hart County Administrator Jon Caime.

Advancing Community Priorities:
This project met the community-identified priority of planning for the future. Fire Department facilities are critical to future economic development and for meeting the needs of residential areas of the county that are experiencing growth. The plan also helps the county in a sustainable way by prioritizing short and long-term spending and providing a model of a fire plan that can be easily updated in the future.