



Executive Summary of Fire Dept. Master Plan

Report to the City of Helena
Commission - 2023

Strategic Planning Committee

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Committee Members

- Commissioner Emily Dean
- Interim City Manager Tim Burton
- Helena Citizen Council Elizabeth Maida-Gerhart
- Finance Director Sheila Danielson
- Fire Chief Jon Campbell
- Assistant Fire Chief Mike Chambers
- IAFF Local 448 Mike McDaniel
- IAFF Local 448 Dave Maslowski
- Rural Fire Council Wayne Noem

Schedule of Meetings

- Aug. 31st, 2022 Review of current Fire Dept. operations
- Sept. 29th, 2022 Staffing model options
- Nov. 1st, 2022 Station 3 and Training Facility
- Jan. 3rd, 2023 Planning and Strategy moving forward
- Mar. 1st, 2023 Executive Summary Review
- Mar. 24th, 2023 Executive Summary Final Draft

Mission Statement

“We, the members of the Helena Fire Department, proudly continue our tradition as Guardians of the Gulch, by professionally providing a quality, effective, skillful, safe, and caring service to protect our community wherever and whenever needed.”

Introduction

In May 2022 a Helena Fire Department Master Plan was provided to the City Commission by Emergency Services Consulting International (ESCI). In August of 2022 the City of Helena Commission created a committee to provide analysis and synopsis of the Helena Fire Dept. Master Plan. It is beyond the scope of this document to report a summary of every finding in the Master Plan. The Master Plan focus is primarily in the areas of Fire Dept. operations, the need for an additional fire station including training facility, the staffing model options to support this expansion, and a variety of short-, mid-, and long-term strategies for the organization. In 2007 a similar undertaking was conducted, and that study found the need for a third fire station by 2012. Since that time utilization of fire and emergency services has continued to grow with 2022 seeing a record year for calls for service surpassing 4,800 Fire Department incidents. Upcoming growth including subdivisions, commercial, and high-density residential projects will continue to increase emergency service utilization in the City of Helena.

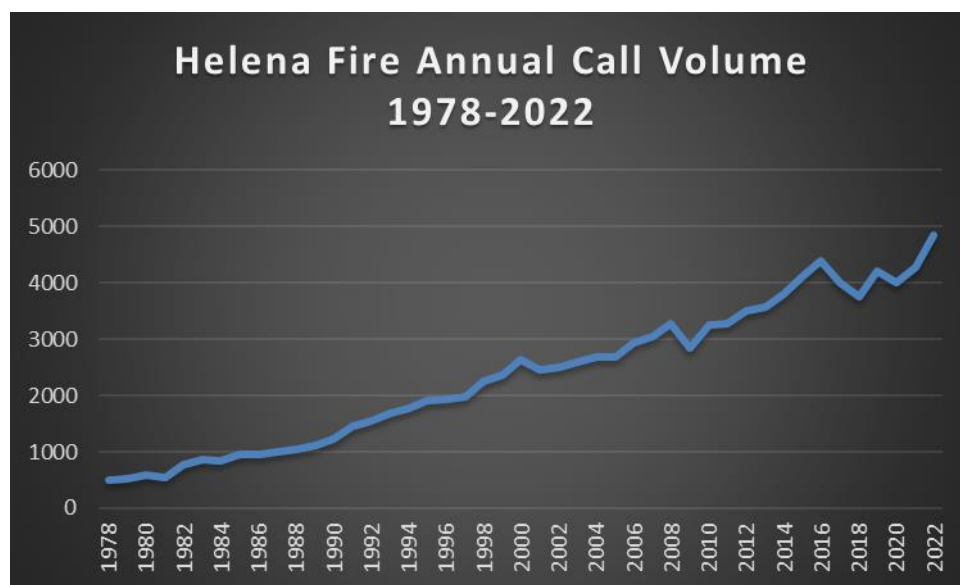


Figure 1

Community risk analysis looks at the potential for major incidents such as wildfire, hazardous materials release, flood, and earthquake. Even with consideration for the potential of large-scale incidents, structure fire is still ranked as the highest community risk incident type. The Master Plan states, “The combination of the Helena Fire Department on duty staff and mutual aid resources surrounding the city cannot draw enough firefighters quickly enough to accomplish

the necessary critical firefighting tasks for structure fires,” (ESCI, p. 178). For Helena Fire Department to build resiliency and improve capabilities for major incidents, we must first begin by addressing the deficits in our capabilities for smaller scale incidents.

Emergency Response

Helena Fire Department’s Suppression Division provides structural and wildland firefighting, non-transport Emergency Medical Services, fire and detection system alarm response, State of Montana Regional Hazardous Materials Response Team, vehicle and transportation incident response, and technical rescue and confined space capabilities.

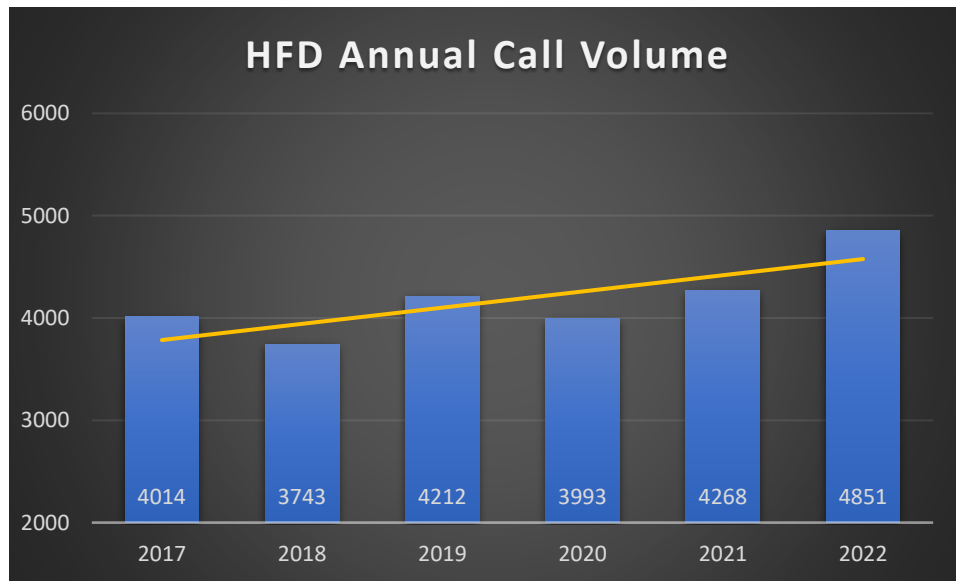


Figure 2

Over the past six years, the average annual increase in call volume has been 4.2%. As a point of reference, in 1979 when station 2 was opened the annual call volume was 504. According to the Master Plan, HFD ran a call volume in 2022 commiserate with the projected volume of 2027, (ESCI, p. 109). If this trend continues, the demands on services may far exceed the call volume projections contained within the Master Plan. In considering the quantity and size of subdivisions, housing, commercial projects on the horizon, and the effects on population and development density, the likelihood for calls for service will continue to rise.

Fire Stations

Since 1979, Helena Fire Department has operated out of two fire stations. Comparing the geographic mapping of calls for service, these two stations are ideally located to provide service for call density in their local areas. Helena Fire Department does not have a station on the North side of the railroad tracks. Population concentration and call for service density is observed in North/Central Helena on the north side of the railroad tracks. The Master Plan call density and response time mapping demonstrates the areas north of the railroad tracks are underserved as compared to areas proximal to current fire station locations, (ESCI p. 113-119). The Fire Dept. Master Plan utilizes several data points to emphasize the benefits and needs of adding a third fire station. In summary, the primary benefits are to improve service delivery and position the Helena Fire Department to be able to adapt to future demands. Distributing call volume across three geographic response areas will improve response times and increase department resiliency for the future.

Staffing

In 2007, it was recommended to add nine new firefighter positions. A mill levy in 2018 added six firefighters, leaving the continued need for three more firefighters to fully staff HFD's two fire stations. The current staffing model is three shifts of 12 firefighters. With vacation and other earned time off, daily staffing is at least eight personnel on duty. In 2022, the number of on duty personnel were reduced from nine to eight due to increasing overtime costs. In a two-station model, three additional firefighter positions would represent full staffing with three shifts of 13 personnel resulting in nine personnel on duty at any given time.

The current staffing model is not sufficient to staff a third fire station. There are several population-based metrics to calculate fire department staffing. To ensure that no one perspective skewed the staffing model, we looked at three staffing recommendations including the Fire Department Master Plan for total suppression staff needed to staff three fire stations.

- Master Plan: 52 Suppression Staff for three stations
- ICMA: 52.07 Suppression Staff for three stations
- NFPA: 55.15 Suppression Staff for three stations

For Helena Fire Department to provide an effective response force in a 3-station model, 15 fire suppression personnel should be added for a total of 51 suppression staff, or 17 suppression staff per shift. This includes the three firefighters needed to fully staff a 2-station model.

Training Facility

A realistic and safe training environment is essential to providing a competent and experienced firefighting force. Helena Fire Department utilizes internally adopted training programs, National Fire Protection Associations (NFPA) standards, and the International Fire Service Accreditation Congress (IFSAC) to train and provide third party certified professional qualifications. The current training building allows HFD to meet the minimum criteria to support these programs. This training building does not, however, provide the opportunity for live fire training. Modern training facilities are better situated to provide for this type of training environment.

The current training building location at the airport takes the on-duty personnel away from their stations. A third station collocated with a training facility would allow crews to rotate through training evolutions while being better positioned to cross staff apparatus and continue to provide emergency services.

Fire Prevention

Helena Fire Department's Fire Prevention and Investigation Bureau (FPiB) applies the International Fire Code in the areas of commercial occupancy inspection, licensing, plan review, systems testing, public education, and fire investigation.

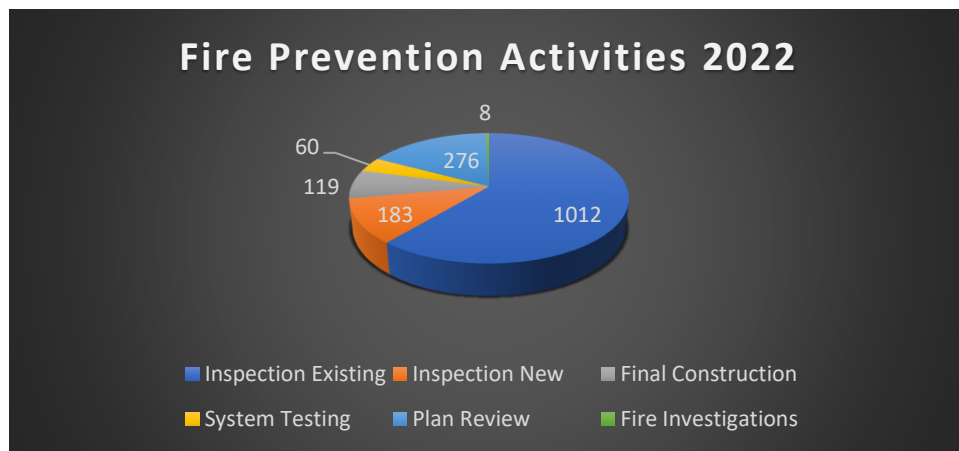


Figure 3

The Master Plan review of the Prevention Bureau indicated that on average 229 Fire and Life Safety Inspections were completed annually. To keep up with the required inspection interval, HFD would have to complete 1,652 annual inspections, (ESCI, p. 82-83). These numbers are not reflective of new developments and new construction. In 2007 the Fire Dept. study recommended adding a Fire Inspector position. This position was added in 2021. By adding a Fire Inspector, the 2022 Prevention Activities graph above shows a strong improvement toward addressing the workload this inspection interval requires. However, at current staffing levels HFD continues to anticipate falling shy of meeting the total inspection volume.

Recommendations

1. Station 3 and Training Facility

- a. Select Station 3 location North of Railroad tracks. As an example, the city owned parcel at the Northwest corner of Kelleher and Custer would provide access to the Northern aspects of Helena with East to West Travel across Custer. This example is well situated for future growth, minimizes negative impacts on residential areas, and is property already owned by the City of Helena thereby reducing procurement costs. HFD's current Capital Improvement Plan addresses the associated apparatus needs that an additional fire station would present.



- b. Utilize available Fire Dept. funding to develop concept design and preliminary architecture for Station 3 including training facility. Moving forward may depend on citizens and elected officials having a clear understanding of what the project is truly asking. Concept design and early-stage planning will provide tangible, real-world perception of what a new fire station will look like and help to provide clarity on future costs.

2. Staffing

- a. Add three full time firefighter positions to maximize the utility and staffing of the current two station model. Adding three personnel will help in the short term to manage overtime costs.
- b. Phase in the additional 12 personnel needed to staff Station 3 over the design and construction project time frames. The financial impact of adding personnel is substantial. By phasing in these personnel, we can moderate costs over time and allow for hiring trainable group sizes.

3. Funding

- a. Explore Funding Options: Bond, Mill Levy Increase, INTERCAP Loan. The current mill levy and general fund funding mechanisms are insufficient to support a new station and staffing.

4. Master Plan Recommendations

- a. Continue to utilize recommendations in Appendix A as a work plan for the overall forward progress and improvement of the Helena Fire Dept.

Conclusion

The Fire Department Strategic Planning Committee recommends adding a third fire station and training facility. ESCI began this study in Summer 2021 by reviewing significant amounts of information submitted by the Department, including previous years of incident data, demographic data, local hazard mitigation studies, Fire Department capital assets and maintenance programs, finance data, and population and economic growth projections. This was followed up with a site visit to gather additional information about the community and Department, including touring the areas slated for significant growth. This research affirmed ESCI's belief that significant community and economic growth is likely to continue, which will undoubtedly increase the demand for public safety services, especially in the delivery of EMS. A third fire station with co-located training facility are critical components in addressing current and future community demands on the Helena Fire Department.

Appendix A

The master plan examination of Helena Fire Department goes beyond the recommendations of third fire station, staffing, and training facility. Across the organization, the Master Plan has provided recommendations for improvements to processes, policies, service delivery, and collective bargaining to name a few. Fire Department staff have been utilizing these recommendations to create a work plan to track progress and make organizational improvements.

Short Term Strategies		
Recommendation (Community Risk Reduction)	Comment	%
Develop detailed processes, including handouts, for assisting developers in understanding specific Fire Code requirements for all aspects of development in the city.	In process	25%
Re-establish an annual fire inspection program of schools and small businesses to include use of on-duty operations shift personnel.	FPIB	33%
Work with the Fire Prevention Bureau and Building Department to develop a mechanism that ensures the HFD is notified of all new buildings that receive final occupancy approval and all new businesses that open in the community.	FPIB - IROL	33%
Recognizing the threat that a wildfire poses to the community and the level of sustained multiyear, multi-pronged efforts required to address it, the city should immediately begin to strengthen readiness, mitigation, and response to Urban Wildland Interface (WUI) Fires.	FPIB – PSA’s and education	75%
Recommendations (Emergency Service Delivery)	Comment	%
Adopt ICS model policy that matches practice and training.	100%	100%
Develop an improved and simplified Pre-Plan process for all target hazards in the city.	New RMS	10%
Establish Automatic Aid Agreements with neighboring fire departments to ensure immediate response of adequate resources to all incidents based on industry standards.	started conversations	10%
Identify a minimum number of technical rescue and Haz Mat qualified personnel to be on duty each day.	potentially impede staffing	0%
Identify stations with their specialty cross-staffed apparatus. An Example would be Station 1 as Technical Rescue, Station 2 as Ladder Truck, and Station 3 (once functional) as HazMat Response.	Already occurring just not Formalized	50%
Provide a daily minimum staffing of 13 emergency response personnel excluding administrative staff. This minimum staffing to include one Battalion Chief and 12 firefighting personnel for three fire stations based on one of the staffing pattern options outlined in Figures 145 and 146.		0%
Relocate the Hazardous Materials Response Unit back into the city as soon as possible.	Still No Space Available	0%
The impediments to achieving the firefighter turnout time should be identified and mitigated to ensure emergency personnel are responding in accordance with national standards. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Install timers in each fire station. • Report turnout time statistics monthly and discuss at regular staff meetings. 	Identified issues fix is TBD New RMS will help.	20%
Consideration of Mobile Integrated Healthcare system with Mental Health.	Other org.	0%
Recommendations (Finance and Budget)	Comment	%

Consider negotiating a buy down of accrued leave balance to improve staffing.	Future CBA	0%
Evaluate a change to the current work schedule to reduce the number of personnel that are on paid leave each day.	CBA, Holiday Buyback	50%
Recommendations (Governance and Admin.)	Comment	%
Contract with the same MPD that oversees St. Peters emergency care providers to provide consistency in performance from initial response to patient transportation to the medical facility.	See EMS contract	100%
Develop a record-keeping code in ERS that correlates to ISO categories, if the department is going to use ISO as the basis of measurement.		100%
Establish an agreement with St. Peters Hospital for the transmission of monthly data on EMS responses so that the fire department can evaluate the level of service provided to its citizens.	quarterly through EMS contract	90%
Reconstruct, update, and implement a comprehensive Policy and Standard Operational Procedure program to ensure consistency of expectations for various response activities and organizational assignments. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore the utilization of existing industry services that are available. Develop a formalized system of policy/procedure distribution and employee acknowledgment for each policy and procedure. Develop a system that regularly (monthly) refreshes employees' knowledge of the policy/procedure manual. Incorporate policies and procedures that are provided in the appendix for the basis of a comprehensive manual. Incorporate a set of policies and procedures that meet the intent of NFPA 1500 and best practices. 	NFPA 1500 analysis done, SOG migration to RMS done, have not determined process for ongoing training	75%
Utilization of scheduling software to provide the efficiency of making requests, providing assignments, and providing final authorization.	New RMS	20%
Recommendations (Health and Wellness)	Comment	%
Development and implementation of a model passport tagging system throughout the Helena Fire Department and all mutual aid partners.	Mutual Aid agreement needed?	75%
Establish a policy for the maximum hours worked, whether regular, overtime, or shift trades, without an appropriate break.	LMC	0%
Establish a formal Safety Program that provides structured process to identify potential safety issues, develop mitigation programs/education, and perform independent investigation of near miss and accidents. The program should be developed under a program of labor and management for maximum effectiveness.	NFPA 1500 LMC	50%
Adopt a comprehensive occupational safety, health, and wellness program and policy. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider seeking out an independent consultation from Montana State Labor and Industries to help guide the department. 	NFPA 1500 LMC	25%
Establish procedure to provide a designated Safety Officer on all major incidents.	Additional Training Implementation	75%
Explore the IAFC-IAFF Peer Fitness Program model to develop a program for the Helena firefighters. This program is an instructive resource for firefighters seeking to improve their health and fitness, including guidance on proper exercise, healthy eating habits, and lifestyle modifications. Most firefighter fatalities are the result of poor physical	have had this before, members are still working on	25%

condition and health against the extreme physical demands and environments firefighters face	this, no official implementation.	
Develop a means of implementing a non-punitive reporting system. In addition, reporting near misses through the www.firefighternearmiss.com benefits the fire service community through developing trends.	Priority?	0%
Provide HazMat Team members with annual physicals and ensure operations meet all State and Federal regulations, including NFPA 1582.	New to FY23	100%
Recommendations (Physical and Capital Resource)	Comment	%
Build and activate Station 3 immediately to help serve the East and Northeast parts of the city which are growing rapidly. Consider a temporary station, while the permanent station is being designed and built. Fire Station 3 will help to reduce response times to the citizens and provide enough resources to develop an effective fire response for the low and moderate risk hazards present in the community. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build Station 3 with a minimum of three apparatus bays and a minimum of two engines deep to facilitate specialty and relief apparatus. 		5%
Recommendations (Training)	Comment	%
Conduct annual joint training with other Hazardous Materials Teams in Montana.	DES no longer funds Hazmat Teams	0%
Recommendations (Planning)	Comment	%
Implement a formal strategic planning process for the HFD including oversight and regular reporting of progress to the entire organization.		50%
Implement a management oversight program to review and report progress on major initiatives in the HFD Master Plan.	Annual Reporting	25%
In conjunction with Lewis and Clark County, develop and integrate a City Emergency Management Team and a specific City of Helena Emergency Management Plan to facilitate support for major emergencies in the community.	Type III IMT? L&C County EM	0%
Mid-Term Strategies		
Recommendations (Emergency Services Delivery)	Comment	%
While the MDCs appear to work well for the law enforcement agencies, they did not meet the needs of the fire service. ESCI recommends that a study be performed to determine where the current MDCs are lacking for the fire service and if any upgrades or new MDCs should be purchased to meet the fire agency's needs.	tablets, changing to IPADs, new RMS	95%
Work with the EMS Board to evaluate the potential for enhanced fire-based EMS partnerships to potentially produce transport revenue to offset staffing costs.	Agreement with SPAS	100%
Recommendations (Finance and Budget)	Comment	%
Work with the State legislature to secure additional ongoing funding for the regional Hazardous Materials Response Team. Various funding models exist in other communities.		0%
Recognizing the lack of tax revenue generated from the large amount of State government property in Helena and the demand on all aspects of emergency services generated by having the State Capital in the city, evaluate working with the State legislature to secure additional ongoing funding to directly support Helena Fire Department's daily operations of fire and EMS resources.		0%
Recommendations (Finance and Budget)	Comment	%

Review of all job descriptions reflect the City's expectations and policies, and the bargaining agreement generally, as well as provide a clear and consistent list of authorities for each position.	Non-union updated	33%
Recommendations (Physical and Capital)	Completion %	
ESCI recommends that all city mechanics working on fire apparatus are certified EVT at the highest achievable level for Fire Apparatus, Ambulance, and Law Enforcement vehicles and equipment.	Working on training (\$)	10%
Station 2 needs to install a proper decontamination station for medical biological and chemical decontamination.	Add as part of Bathroom remodel	0%
Purchase an emergency vehicle more appropriate for storage and response of technical rescue equipment and place it in a location to ensure rapid response.	No additional apparatus space	0%
ESCI recommends that Station 1 and 2 deploy Quint (Engine/Ladder) apparatus with a 75' ladder as first out apparatus to ensure maximum flexibility and provide two elevated streams for defensive fire attack.	Future operational and capital decision	0%
Long-Term Strategies		
Recommendations (Emergency Service Delivery)	Comment	%
The impediments to achieving the dispatch processing time should be identified and mitigated to ensure emergency calls are received, categorized, and dispatched in accordance with national standards.	New RMS	10%
Recommendations (Physical and Capital Resource)	Comment	%
Conduct an architectural review of current and future station design features and needs for Fire Station 1. ESCI noted the following deficiencies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The apparatus bays cannot hold the weight of the ladder truck and potentially other apparatus needing to be deployed from Station 1. • The facility is not compliant with ADA requirements. • Public entrance is poorly marked for citizens and difficult to access. • Inadequate office space for future growth. • Critical Infrastructure not protected by sprinkler system. • Crew quarters are at full capacity and additional future staffing cannot be accommodated. • The training room is insufficient sized to conduct classroom training, staff meetings, and other organizational uses. • Insufficient storage areas for apparatus and equipment increases the deployment of responses. • Inadequate security system, and perimeter fencing. • A proper decontamination station for medical biological and chemical decon is essential. 	Working on ADA doors, will put in for Sprinkler grant next year, just added cameras, much will be fixed with addition of modern 3 rd fire station	0%
Recommendations (Planning)	Comment	%
Evaluate the potential urban growth boundaries and expansion that would necessitate the forecasting, planning, purchasing, and construction of Station 4 North Valley and Station 5 located to the East of Helena. Also, consideration of potential consolidation of services would provide efficiency and reduce duplication of administration, facilities, and services.	Addressed in this Master Plan	0%
Plan for a future Station 4 and Station 5 to include Consolidation with adjacent fire districts.	no legal ability to consolidate currently	0%

Recommendations (Training)	Comment	%
ESCI recommends the proper siting, financing, construction, and development of a training facility to include ample property, live fire props, and a 4 or 5 story training structure to enable the myriad of skills that must be exercised regularly to remain proficient. Explore partnerships with other Fire Departments, State Fire Marshal office, and the local fire college to cost share, and benefit regional partners.	Talked with Airport and they have land and are willing to assist	0%