Strategic Plan 2025-2030

WILSON FIRE/RESCUE SERVICES

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Wilson Fire/Rescue Services
2025 – 2030 Strategic Plan

Approval Page

City Manager

7/15/2025

Date

Albert L. Alston, Jr.
Fire Chief

7-15-2025

Date

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It is my honor to present to you the 2025 through 2030 Strategic Plan. Wilson Fire/Rescue Services has a storied tradition of service to the community. This plan will mirror our continuous effort to better serve our customers, the citizens of Wilson, and the members of Wilson Fire/Rescue Services. This plan will guide our management decisions, organizational structure, and efficient use of city resources.

Our strategic plan is written in accordance with the guidelines set forth in the Commission on Fire Accreditation (CFAI) Fire & Emergency Service Self-Assessment Manual 10th Ed. A broad cross-section of community leaders, business and non-profit representatives, citizens, and local elected officials participated in expressing what was important to them in the delivery of 21st century emergency and non-emergency services. Through this effort, we were able to outline community expectations, concerns, and priorities.

The members of Wilson Fire/Rescue Services were an essential part of this process. They came with open minds, recognizing that their conversations and ideas would chart the course of our future. This dynamic group was made up of service professionals from all ethnic groups, generations, backgrounds, and years of service. They did more than develop a strategic plan, they created a new normal for this organization.

Therefore, it is the goal of Wilson Fire/Rescue Services to constantly seek input from both our external and internal partners to ensure a high level of effectiveness and efficiency in the delivery of emergency services. As the world around us continues to change, we are faced with demands for service that the traditional fire service has never before seen. It is important to understand that the fire service of today is not the fire service of yesterday. While this plan will provide a road map of where we want to take our organization in the next five years, we recognize that as our city and workforce evolve, we will have to make progressive modifications to stay competitive in the constantly changing fire service.

This strategic plan offers an inspiring glimpse into the potential success of our department. However, we must always remember that the foundation of our existence is the people in the communities we serve. The relationships and bonds formed through the positive non-emergency interactions we have with people are as important as the ones we have with them in moments of crisis. Let us never forget the “service” portion of being a part of the fire service, as the work we do for others will ultimately be the legacy we leave with our city.

Albert L. Alston, Jr.
Fire Chief

INTRODUCTION

Wilson Fire/Rescue Services (WFRS) provides an all-hazards approach in the protection of the lives and property of the residents, businesses, and visitors of Wilson, North Carolina. WFRS is consistently working to achieve and/or maintain the highest level of professionalism and efficiency on behalf of those it serves. The following community-driven strategic plan was written with the guidelines set forth in the Commission on Fire Accreditation (CFAI) Fire & Emergency Service Self-Assessment Manual 10th Ed. and is intended to guide the department within the established parameters set forth by the authority having jurisdiction.

The community-driven strategic planning process goes beyond just the development of a document. It challenges the department's members to critically examine paradigms, values, philosophies, beliefs, and desires. It also provides the department with an opportunity to participate in the development of the department's direction and focus. Members of the department's community and department stakeholders demonstrated commitment to this important project and remain committed to the document's completion and future plan execution.


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ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND

Originally incorporated in 1849, the City of Wilson, North Carolina has continued to thrive and grow to the municipality it is today. Once widely known as "The World's Greatest Tobacco Market," the city now has a quality economy centered around agriculture, manufacturing, commercial, and service industries.

Wilson Fire/Rescue Services has a long history of providing emergency services in the city. The department first came into existence as the Phoenix Fire Hose Company in 1858. The name was changed to the Wilson Fire Department around 1880. From its genesis, the department was a robust, all-volunteer organization until 1938, when the evolution was completed into a fully paid, career department.

The department has continued to keep pace with growth and changes within the fire service industry and the risks encountered within the city. Focusing on quality delivery and change, emergency medical services became part of the response matrix. As the department positioned itself as an all-hazard agency, it was decided to change the department name to Wilson Fire/Rescue Services (WFRS) in 1993.

Today, WFRS provides its services from five fire stations with resources located strategically throughout the city and deployed based on risk and demand. Staffed with 101 uniformed and civilian professionals, the department remains dedicated to life safety of its community by providing emergency operations and community risk reduction. The department's embrace of excellence is evidenced by its continued internationally accredited status, and its Class 1 ISO protection class rating. WFRS continues to remain mission-focused and dedicated to those it serves.

1849 City of Wilson, NC incorporated

1858 Department first existed as the Phoenix Fire Hose Company

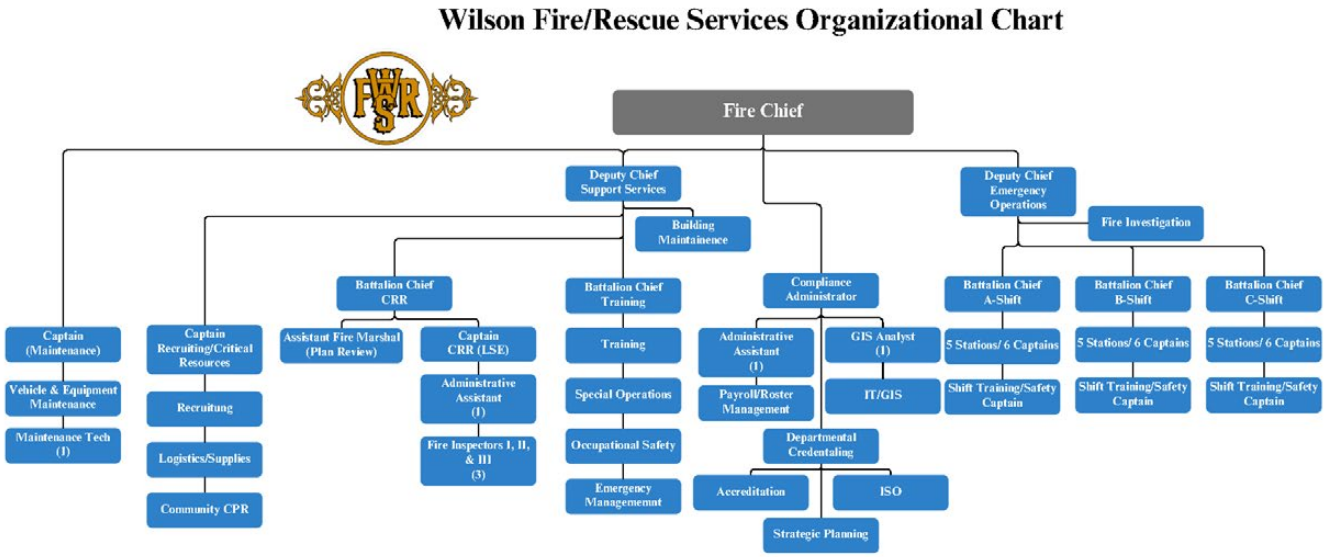
1880 Department named changed to the Wilson Fire Department

1938 Changed from all volunteer organization to a fully paid, career department

1993 Department name changed to Wilson Fire/Rescue Services (WFRS)

Today Remains dedicated to life safety

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE



COMMUNITY-DRIVEN STRATEGIC PLANNING

For many successful departments, the voice of the community drives their operations and charts the course for their future. A community-driven emergency service department is one that seeks to gather and utilize the needs and expectations of its community in the development and/or improvement of the services provided. To ensure that the community remains a focus of the department's direction, a community-driven strategic planning process was used to develop this strategic plan.

A strategic plan is a living management tool that provides short-term direction, builds a shared vision, documents goals and objectives, and optimizes the use of resources.

Effective strategic planning benefits from a consistent and cohesively structured process employed across all levels of the department. Planning is a continuous process, one with no clear beginning and no defined end. While plans can be developed on a regular basis, it is the process of planning that is important, not the publication of the plan itself. Most importantly, strategic planning can be an opportunity to unify the management, employees, and stakeholders through a common understanding of where the department is going, how everyone involved can work to that common purpose, and how progression and success will be measured.

COMMUNITY GROUP FINDINGS

The department identified community stakeholders to ensure broad representation. The community stakeholders were comprised of some who reside or work within WFRS' coverage area, and some who were recipients of the department's services.

Wilson Fire/Rescue Services' Community Stakeholders		
Rebecca Agner	Will Aycock	Benny Boykin
Michael Cobb	Joe Hartsfield	Tim Holley
James Johnson, III	Rodger Lentz	John Maclaga
Cinnamon Narron	Adam Rech	Donald Richardson
Chelsea Sanders	Doug Searcy	Ashley Spencer
Carol Stevens-Atkinson	Kalif Ward	Lori Winstead
Calvin Woodard		

A key element of WFRS' organizational philosophy is having a high level of commitment to the community, as well as recognizing the importance of community satisfaction. The department invited community representatives to provide feedback on services provided by the department. Respondents were asked to provide a prioritized perspective of the programs and services provided by the department. Also, input was gathered during the meeting of community expectations and concerns, as well as positive and other comments about the department. Specific findings of the community stakeholders are provided in the appendix of this document.

Community Stakeholders

COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

To best dedicate time, energy, and resources to services most desired by its community, WFRS needs to understand what the customers consider to be their priorities. With that, the community stakeholders were asked to prioritize the programs offered by the department through a process of direct comparison. The results were as follows:

Programs	Ranking
Fire Suppression	1
Emergency Medical Services	2
Technical Rescue	3
Hazardous Materials	4
Community Risk Reduction	5
Public Fire & Life Safety Education	6
Domestic Preparedness Planning & Response	7
Fire Investigation	8

See Appendix 1 for a complete list of the community findings including expectations, areas of concern, positive feedback, and other thoughts and comments.

Community Stakeholders

DEPARTMENT STAKEHOLDER GROUP FINDINGS

The department stakeholder sessions served to discuss the department's approach to community-driven strategic planning. Focus was given to the department's perceived strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The department held sessions with each member of the organization to allow input from every personnel.

MISSION

The purpose of the mission is to answer the questions:

- Who are we?
- Why do we exist?
- What do we do?
- Why do we do it?
- For whom?

During the stakeholder sessions the mission statement was reviewed to ensure it still answered the questions and was accepted by the department.

Wilson Fire/Rescue Services Mission

We are dedicated to life safety by providing emergency services and community risk reduction.

VALUES

Values make up the personality and culture of the department. During the stakeholder sessions the values were reviewed and accepted by the department members

Wilson Fire/Rescue Services Values

Pride – a commitment to the ownership and continued excellence of our organization and its mission.

Integrity – providing selfless service with character, honesty, and honor.

Teamwork – exhibiting strong leadership and cooperation throughout the organization to achieve a common goal.

Vision – honoring past endeavors, while preparing for future opportunities.

Knowledge – ongoing effort to improve education, skills, and technology.

The mission and values are the foundation of the department. Every effort will be made to keep these current and meaningful so that the individuals who make up WFRS are guided by them in the accomplishment of the goals, objectives, and day-to-day tasks.

SWOT ANALYSIS

Through a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats), the department candidly identifies the positive and negative attributes. The SWOT analysis also provides an opportunity for the department to evaluate its operating environment for areas in which it can capitalize, as well as those that pose a danger. Department stakeholders identified some of the strengths and weaknesses of WFRS, as well as the possible opportunities and potential threats. Information gathered through this analysis provides guidance toward the larger issues and gaps that exist within the department. The information collected will assist the department in finding its broader critical issues and service gaps.

Appendix 2 consists of the SWOT data and analysis collected by the department stakeholders.

CRITICAL ISSUES AND SERVICE GAPS

Following the identification and review of the department's SWOT, critical issues and service gaps were identified. The critical issues and services gaps identified by the stakeholders provides further guidance toward the identification of the strategic initiatives, which will ultimately lend direction for the development of goals, objectives, critical tasks, and timelines.

Wilson Fire/Rescue Services' Strategic Initiative
Training
Physical Resources
Internal & External Communication
Health & Safety
Workforce Planning & Development

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

To continuously achieve the mission of WFRS, realistic goals and objectives with timelines for completion must be established. These will serve to enhance strengths, address identified weaknesses, provide a clear direction, and address the concerns of the community. These should become a focus of the department's efforts, as they will direct the organization to its desired future while reducing the obstacles and distractions along the way.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Using the continuous improvement model, further develop the training and delivery models to enhance personal growth and professional development to improve service delivery to the community.

Objective A	**Evaluate the current training and delivery models and identify opportunities for improvement.**
Timeframe	**Assigned to:**
Critical Tasks	• *Identify all training and delivery models the department offers.* • *Evaluate EMS training, recruit training, and in-service training for efficiency and effectiveness.* • *Solicit input from all divisions for current and future training needs.* • *Develop a report of findings with recommendations for the Senior Staff .*

Objective B	**Identify areas for improvement in the training facility/grounds.**
Timeframe	**Assigned to:**
Critical Tasks	• *Evaluate the current training facilities/grounds and identify any areas for improvements.* • *Evaluate the need for a secondary training site.* • *In conjunction with City Facilities Services, create a maintenance plan for the training grounds.*

Objective C	**Develop a method to continually evaluate the WF/RS's training model to ensure that it is meeting the organization's mission.**
Timeframe	**Assigned to:**
Critical Tasks	• *Evaluate all relevant and new curricula.* • *Evaluate the need of new facilities.* • *Evaluate all new and revised training model opportunities.* • *Develop a report of findings with recommendations for the Senior Staff.* • *Implement any approved changes in areas identified as needing improvement.*

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Prioritize the health and wellness of personnel to cultivate a resilient and healthy workforce and foster a culture that promotes physical fitness, mental well-being, and preventative health measures.

Objective A	**Evaluate and analyze current health and wellness programs to determine their effectiveness.**
Timeframe	**Assigned to:**
Critical Tasks	• *Determine what health and wellness programs are in place.* • *Collect data pertaining to health and wellness in the department.* • *Create a department-wide survey for input on the current program.*

Objective B	**Conduct a needs analysis for all aspects of health and wellness.**
Timeframe	**Assigned to:**
Critical Tasks	• *Research industry best practices for all aspects of health and wellness.* • *Create a priority list of programs needed.* • *Identify resources needed to establish or update programs.* • *Develop a report of findings with recommendations for the Senior Staff.*

Objective C	**Initiate and implement changes or additions to the health and wellness program.**
Timeframe	**Assigned to:**
Critical Tasks	• *Train all personnel on the program.* • *Conduct an annual evaluation of the program.* • *Recommend and implement any needed changes.*

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Maintain and develop WF/RS's facilities, fleet, and equipment in a cost-effective manner to continue to deliver high-quality cutting-edge service to the community.

Objective A	**In conjunction with Facility Services, utilize the most modern business practices to assess, analyze and plan for the replacement/remodel of all facilities.**
Timeframe	**Assigned to:**
Critical Tasks	• *Identify all facilities under WF/RS control.* • *Evaluate all facilities to ensure safe and efficient operations.* • *Develop a plan for remodel/replacement.* • *Develop a report of findings with recommendations for the Senior Staff*

Objective B	**Evaluate all apparatus and all mounted equipment to ensure safe and efficient operations.**
Timeframe	**Assigned to:**
Critical Tasks	• *Identify all apparatus under WF/RS control.* • *Evaluate all apparatus to ensure safe and efficient operations.* • *Evaluate the current replacement plan to ensure it continues to meet the needs of the department.* • *Develop a report of findings with recommendations for the Senior Staff*

Objective C	**Evaluate current and future needs of technology hardware and software platforms.**
Timeframe	**Assigned to:**
Critical Tasks	• *Identify all technology equipment assigned to WFRS control.* • *Evaluate the efficiency of all technology to ensure it meets the needs of WF/RS* • *Create a replacement plan for WF/RS's current technology.* • *Develop a report of findings with recommendations for the Senior Staff.*

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GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Develop and enhance the organization to develop a plan that fosters a productive and satisfied workforce.

Objective A	**Identify recruitment and retention challenges.**
Timeframe	**Assigned to:**
Critical Tasks	• *Engage employees on current recruitment and retention programs.* • *Analyze staffing to determine trends around retention.* • *Evaluate effectiveness of current city of Wilson recruitment and retention efforts.* • *If needed, propose an updated recruitment and retention improvement plan.*

Objective B	**Analyze the effectiveness of developmental programs and strategies.**
Timeframe	**Assigned to:**
Critical Tasks	• *Evaluate current programs and strategies.* • *Determine effectiveness of specific programs in the areas of leadership, coaching, mentoring, wellness, and project management.* • *If needed, draft an action plan to enhance existing and develop new programs based on findings for the Senior Staff.*

Objective C	**Evaluate current staffing model based on the community's risk and historical data to ensure it still meets the community's needs.**
Timeframe	**Assigned to:**
Critical Tasks	• *Analyze historical data as it relates to staffing.* • *Analyze current staffing model to identify any gaps.* • *Compare analysis to industry standards and organizations of similar size.*

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GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Enhance internal and external communication strategy to enlighten, educate, inform, and provide opportunities for community and employee engagement.

Objective A	**Analyze and evaluate current communication processes for clarity and effectiveness.**
Timeframe	**Assigned to:**
Critical Tasks	• *Compile a list of communications currently used.* • *Evaluate and rate the effectiveness of each method.* • *Compile results of the evaluation.*

Objective B	**Explore alternative methods of communication available.**
Timeframe	**Assigned to:**
Critical Tasks	• *Compile a list of what is available and permitted by the city through research methods.* • *Evaluate and rate the effectiveness of available products and processes.* • *Compile results of the evaluation.*

Objective C	**Evaluate and consider implementation of preferred methods of communication for community and personnel engagement.**
Timeframe	**Assigned to:**
Critical Tasks	• *Provide education to personnel/community regarding the new communication strategies.* • *Roll out the new communication strategies.*

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APPENDIX 1

Community Expections

Understanding what the community expects of its fire service organization is critically important to developing a long-range perspective. With this knowledge, internal emphasis may need to be changed or reinforced to fulfill the community needs.

Respondents were asked to list, in priority order, the expectations they have for Wilson Fire/Rescue Services. Responses were then analyzed for themes and weighted. The weighting of the prioritized responses was as follows: if it was the respondent's first entry, then it received five weighted points. Weighting gradually decreased so that if it was the respondent's fifth entry, then it received one weighted point. The weighted themes were then sorted from the highest cumulative weight to the lowest cumulative weight and listed below. The numbers in the parentheses are the cumulative weighted value that correlated with the theme identified. While the themes are listed in prioritized, weighted order, all responses were important in the planning process. The following are the expectations of the community stakeholders:

Community Expectations of Wilson Fire/Rescue Services

- Accreditation due to it shows the department's continued commitment to professionalism and service.
- Be a problem solver for the community to facilitate continued growth.
- Be first responders & experts on any hazards that could happen in Wilson (train accidents, plane crashes, etc.)
- Be ready.
- Be trained & prepared.
- Build relationships in the community to increase public awareness about risk reduction.
- Carry themselves professionally in the community.
- Community engaged.
- Conduct fire investigations.
- Continued community service to the City of Wilson and the residents on which it serves.
- Continued support from elected officials to obtain necessary apparatus to conduct day-to-day life saving duties.
- Educate children and adult citizens on fire safety.
- Emergency preparedness.
- EMS/ First responder response.
- Ensure employees are trained and equipped.
- Exceptional salary competitiveness to obtain & sustain qualified fire service personnel.
- Firefighter safety.
- Growth.
- Have educated & trained staff.
- Home grown talent being hired.
- Inspect buildings for potential fire hazards.
- Keep citizens safe.
- Keep up with growth in Wilson.
- Maintain high ISO rating.
- Partner with other agencies to provide coordinated preparedness & response.
- Prepared to respond to incidents, manage those incidents, and ensure the safety of our community throughout.
- Preplanning & communication with other agencies to ensure seamless response at the time of the incident.
- Professional employees.
- Properly prepared, educated, & trained for fire suppression & basic EMS services.
- Provide education & public safety tips.
- Provide leadership to community in both preparedness and risk reduction.
- Provide top quality service.
- Public safety, focus on fire safety.
- Quick response time.
- Respond quickly in the event of fire, medical emergency, or extraction from dangerous situations.
- Respond/rescue, protect, educate, and prevention.
- Responsiveness.
- Risk reduction education.
- Support staff.
- Technical skill & resources to address the critical challenge upon arrival at the scene.
- Timely response to emergencies.
- Top of the line equipment to aid in life safety and fire suppression.
- Well maintained equipment
- Well trained staff.

APPENDIX 1

Areas of Community Concern

The planning process would be incomplete without expression from the community stakeholders regarding concerns about the department. Some areas of concern may, in fact, be a weakness within the delivery system, while some weaknesses may also be misperceptions based upon a lack of information, understanding, or incorrect information.

Areas of Community Concern about Wilson Fire/Rescue Services

- Ability to recruit staffing needs.
- Adequate apparatus numbers.
- Adequate stations compared to growth.
- Any needs of expanding industry that we don't currently have.
- Coverage for entire city as the city grows.
- Ensure continued support from elected leaders to keep competitive salaries.
- Ensure department has adequate resources, which includes staff, equipment, and time.
- Equipment and apparatus upgrades.
- Evolution of the service to reflect new realities, needs, and risks.
- Fire department growth with the city growth.
- Fire Marshall's key job is safety & growth. This could be an issue if we lost this person while we are growing.
- Future staffing levels and recruitment.
- Growth of department (staffing)
- Having the necessary resources & number of employees to cover our community.
- Hazards that the community hasn't considered happening.
- Increasing expenses of equipment and fire facilities.
- Keep up with future growth (are there enough resources)
- Keeping firefighters safe from chemical exposures from combustion by-products.
- No concerns
- Retain and attract top talent (train to top level)
- Recruitment
- Technology up to date.
- Training

APPENDIX 1

Positive Community Feedback

The community's view on the department's strengths are established to help with the creation of the strategic plan. Proper utilization and promotion of the strengths may often help the department overcome or offset some of the identified weakness

Positive Community Comments about Wilson Fire/Rescue Services

- Accreditation and keeping accredited status.
- Always professional
- Called the fire department two times in our business. The patience and response were great.
- Certification/accreditation
- Community Partners
- Effective leadership team in the department
- Equipment with several new trucks
- Excellent community education program
- Excellent reputation
- Experience and knowledge capabilities of fore staff.
- Friendly
- Good community partners
- Great attitude/teamwork
- Great leadership
- Great reputation in the community
- Great staff
- High ISO rating is "symptom" of excellence overall. This is great!
- Involvement with the community
- Proactive
- Professional standard maintained at every level.
- Professionalism
- Programs for the community to assist with fire protection and child safety.
- Quick response time
- Responsive
- Skill, organization, and attention to detail
- Terrific staff
- Thanks for not settling for "ok". I don't want a fire at home but if I had one, I'm so glad to be in Wilson.
- Top tier agency. Keep up the good work!
- Training, branding, public engagement, and professionalism
- Very involved in the community
- Very responsive & supportive
- Very skilled dept for young staff
- We are blessed to live here because of WFRS.
- Well respected department
- WFRS came to my church 2 years ago - small issue with smoking light in sanctuary during morning worship - EXCELLENT investigation.

Other Thoughts and Comments

The community was asked to share any other comments they had about the department or its services. The following written comments were received

Other Community Comments about Wilson Fire/Rescue Services

- I have full trust in our professionals, WFRS is great!
- I support our local fire dept and their efforts to keeping community safe.
- Thank you for keeping our community safe.
- Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback & educate us on WFRS.
- Thanks for asking for feedback.
- WFRS is an excellent organization with a great group of leaders. They work well with community partners and truly engage a great attitude and work ethic.
- Wilson Fire Rescue is truly a remarkable department compared to other agencies. From interaction with other public safety stakeholders to interaction with the community. They are exceptional and professional.

APPENDIX 2

Strengths

It is important for any department to identify its strengths to ensure that it can provide the services requested by the community, and that strengths are consistent with issues facing the department. Often, identification of departmental strengths leads to the channeling of efforts toward primary community needs that match those strengths. Programs that do not match departmental strengths, or the primary function of the department, should be seriously reviewed to evaluate the rate of return on staff time and allocated funds.

Through a consensus process, the department stakeholders identified the department's strengths as follows:

Strengths of Wilson Fire/Rescue Services	
Good response times	Staffing
Proactive fire prevention	EMS response and service
Health insurance	Equipment and apparatus
Involvement in the community	Always put citizens and life safety first
Formal and informal leaders	Strong diverse workforce
Our personnel	Leadership openminded and willing to listen
Brotherhood	Competitive pay for size of department
ISO 1 Rating	Held to a high standard
Team oriented	Good leadership
Adaptability	Multiple committees
Providing department academy	Maintain accreditation
Family oriented	Maintenance division
Training center with multiple evolutions	Clear pathways to promotion

APPENDIX 2

Weaknesses

For any department to continue to move progressively forward, it must not only be able to identify its strengths, but also those areas where it functions poorly or not at all. These areas of needed enhancements are not the same as threats to be identified later in this document, but rather those day-to-day issues and concerns that may slow or inhibit progress. The following items were identified by the department stakeholders as weaknesses:

Weaknesses of Wilson Fire/Rescue Services	
Uniform supply challenges	Fast-paced growth of community
Ability to maintain good morale	Coverage and response to outlying areas
Pay compression	Young officers
Retention	Physical training program
Fixed facility infrastructure	Internal communication
Funding for training opportunities	

Opportunities

The opportunities for the department depend on the identification of strengths and weaknesses and how they can be enhanced. The focus of opportunities is not solely on existing service, but on expanding and developing new possibilities both inside and beyond the traditional service area. The department stakeholders identified the following potential opportunities:

Opportunities of Wilson Fire/Rescue Services	
Outside training	Improve pride and ownership
Improve internal personnel relationships	Knowledge from tenured personnel
Host in-house certification training	Sponsored training
Department growth with the City's growth	Life safety initiatives with the community

Threats

By recognizing possible threats, the department can reduce the potential for loss. Fundamental to the success of any strategic plan is the understanding that threats are not completely and/or directly controlled by the department. Some of the current and potential threats identified by the department stakeholders were as follows:

Potential Threats of Wilson Fire/Rescue Services	
Public threats against first responders	Increasing response times to areas
Multiple incidents occurring at the same time	Rising operational costs
New building construction	Decrease in valuable experience
Funding	Terrorism
Changes in the community	Apparatus build times
Mass retiring	Increasing growth in the city

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