

VISTA FIRE DEPARTMENT



Strategic Plan 2010

Vista Fire Department

Strategic Plan

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Vista Fire Department

Strategic Plan

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1. Strategic Planning “A New Beginning”

We are at a cross roads in our department’s history that will require the involvement of all our members to set and meet goals and objectives that will make it possible to continue to provide the fire and emergency services our community requires as an all volunteer force. Strong leadership, clear vision and core values will increasingly become more important to the accomplishment of our goals. Our role as an emergency service provider has become and will continue to be more complex and challenging in the future. Maintaining an adequate, well equipped and trained department with a defined plan of action, based on our members’ needs and concerns as well as a strong vision from our leadership will get us to the next level.

A committee was chosen to reflect a cross section of the membership from new to more senior members, firefighters, and EMT’s. The committee was given a briefing on the process of Strategic Planning and then started with a clean white sheet of paper.

Areas of concern were identified for improvement during the Strategic Planning Process. These areas will be further defined by the entire membership in results compiled from several surveys we will ask our members to take. From your feedback we will develop plans of action to improve how we communicate, respond to emergencies, motivate our members, increase our membership, serve the community, and prepare for the future.

As a part of the process, will perform a “SWOT analysis” to identify our department’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Our present mission statement will be reviewed and possibly modified. We will identify what our members’ core values are and publish them to let everyone know why we exist and what is important to our organization.

The end result of the committee’s work will produce a direction for our department for the next 5 years and beyond. While the committee has the lion’s share of the work, we will rely on all of our members for input into the future development of our department. When called on to do so, we ask that you please fill the surveys out as truthfully as possible and in a timely fashion.

While the process of developing this plan could take a full year, changes in how we do business must start as soon as possible. We can only work to repair the issues that are brought to our attention. We must adapt to our changing environment and continue in our pursuit of excellence. Our existence as a volunteer fire department serving our neighbors with professionalism, honesty and high moral standards depends it.

Chief William R. Dingee, Committee Chairman

2. Organizational Overview:

Established in 1941 to serve Vista Fire District N^o.1, Vista Volunteer Fire Department has served the small community of Vista with distinction. Located in the **Town of Lewisboro** in Westchester County, New York, we are bordered by South Salem to the north, Pound Ridge to the west, Ridgefield Connecticut and Wilton Connecticut to the east, and New Canaan, Connecticut to the south.

Vista fire district No.1 covers about seven square miles and 1400 households. We are mainly single-family residential with some small businesses, condominiums, lumber yard and a supermarket. The district includes several houses over 100 years old, a few horse farms, and several antique barns. We are also home to Meadow Pond Elementary School , part of the Katonah-Lewisboro school district. Our elevation ranges between 450 and 750 feet above sea level.

The Vista Volunteer Fire Department, Inc. provides suppression, rescue and emergency medical services for the Vista Fire District. As a member of the 13th Battalion in Westchester County, we respond to mutual aid requests from fire departments in both New York and Connecticut. The all volunteer force of 50 members responds to an average of 250 calls for assistance per year.

We respond out of one station which houses 2 engines, a tanker, a rescue and two BLS ambulances. The firehouse is presently under major renovation which has created some operational issues. We have identified this as an opportunity to create a more efficient operation and create an environment that will hopefully increase our membership and as in the past become the center of the community we once were.

3. The Strategic Planning Team

The Strategic Planning Team was assembled in March 2010 and meets on a regular basis for the entire year to perform background research, survey members, identify strategic issues facing the Department and to develop the strategic goals and action plans to implement those goals. The team consisted of:

Chief Bill Dingee	President Mark Albert
Commissioner Adam Ochs	Commissioner Jim Hackett
A/C Gary Lawson	A/C Sean Kelly
Capt Jeff Peck	Lt Dan Cruz
FF/EMT Jen Dingee	FF/EMT Duncan Grossman
EMT Kim Sauer	FF Lynda Scott
EMT Mike Behringer	FF Mike Peck
FF/ EMT Scott Snider	Assoc. Member Tom Lobosco

4. Mission Statement

We, the volunteer members of the Vista Fire Department, Incorporated, make it our mission to protect the lives, property and the environment in the community in which we serve: Vista Fire District #1.

The Department will provide trained professionals in the areas of fire protection, emergency medical services and all hazards emergency first response. We promote volunteerism in fulfilling our mission without prejudice.

Our members are committed to discharging their duties with professionalism, honesty and high moral standards.

5. Overview of the Process Utilized

The process utilized for the development of the Vista Fire Department Strategic Plan was a combination of the process included in *Fire Department Strategic Planning* by Mark Wallace and the strategic planning processes commonly used in private industry.

Before we could begin working on the strategic plan, we had to be confident that there were sufficient benefits to be gained from the strategic planning process. From our research, we were able to determine that:

- A department that is constantly becoming better than it was before challenges its members to perform the tasks of the organization in a way that will make it better tomorrow than it is today.
- A fire department that knows where it's going, knows the environment in which it must operate and has identified how to get there has the best chance of achieving its goals and objectives.
- Strategies provide guidance and direction to an organization as it frames what it is, what it does, and how it will accomplish the mission of the organization.
- A strategic planning system doesn't deal with decisions made in the future. Rather, it deals with decisions made today that will affect the future.
- Creating a fire department that is proactive and receptive to change is the only real chance we have to stay on the leading edge, both in terms of technology and our service to the community.
- If we create a situation where every member understands the desired results, the defined mission, and the goals, we can then turn them loose to create a better future.
- Thinking and acting strategically can allow an organization to deal effectively with rapidly changing circumstances.

Based upon our research and discussions, it was determined that a strategic planning process would be very beneficial to the Vista Fire Department. Once we identified and understood the value of a well written strategic plan, we decided that there were a number of areas that would have to be reviewed and that a significant amount of research would need to be gathered before we could begin to consider what our strategic issues are, how the ideal future of the Vista Fire Department should look and what strategies would need to be to get there.

For our strategic plan to be effective and be useful, we must also plan effectively for each of the following:

- Human resource element
- Financial support (Donations and Operation Costs covered by fire district).
- The political and managerial environment
- Numerous external influences that may establish barriers or mandates to our programs

Each of the above will have an impact on whether our own people embrace the strategic plan and follow it to assure that it is successfully implemented and has a favorable impact on the future of our department. To further define our process we determined that there are five fundamental questions that we must ask and answer if the strategic plan development process is to be successful and that a high-quality plan can be developed and implemented. Those questions are:

1. Where are we going? (our mission)
2. How do we get there? (our strategies)
3. What is our blueprint for action (plans and budgets)
4. How do we know if we are on track? (metrics and controls)
5. Actions to be taken to redirect then reevaluate our efforts if they veer off course

Of significant value to the team throughout this process was the knowledge that we had and continue to have the backing and support of the membership to complete and implement our strategic plan.

6. Strategic Plan Development Process

The following is a brief synopsis of the steps we utilized in our strategic planning process:

1. **Team** - Assembled a team of volunteer members representing a cross section of our department and reviewed the strategic planning process to be used.
2. **Values Audit** - Identify the Department's value system through a survey filled out anonymously by all members. A letter that discussed the importance of the values identification process and the fact that all response to the surveys would be anonymous. The team then developed an electronic survey hosted by Survey Monkey. Com and compiled results. Paper versions were also made available for those who did not use computers. 31 surveys were returned and results made available for review.
3. **Identify Values** - Summarized and evaluated the completed surveys to identify the values of the organization and its members. By identifying our core values, we developed an overall perspective of our membership that will be necessary when we begin to evaluate other areas.
4. **Mission & Core Values** – After review of all of the responses to the values survey, the team reviewed the existing mission statement for the Department and found it to be accurate and up to date.
5. **Stakeholders** – By identifying and understanding who all of the internal and external stakeholders in the Vista Fire Department are, we can better identify their needs and how we can best serve them.
6. **Mandates** - Identified the Department's formal and informal mandates. Mandates comprise those things that our Department and its members must abide by. Understanding them allows us to determine where we do and do not have flexibility in our operations and activities.
7. **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT)** – An honest assessment of the internal strengths and weaknesses and the external opportunities and threats of the

Department provides a good perspective of our operating environment and limitations. The SWOT also are considered in the process of identifying our strategic issues.

8. **Estimate The Future Operating Environment** – Given that our strategic plan has a five year planning horizon, it is necessary to estimate how the community will change over that time period.
9. **Strategic Issue Identification** – Based upon all of the proceeding procedures and the perspectives provided by our planning team members, the strategic issues of the Department were identified.
10. **Strategies to Address the Issues** – Once the strategic issues were evaluated and the ideal future envisioned, our team used the information previously developed to identify potential strategies to deal with each of the strategic issues and choose the most appropriate strategy for each of the strategic issues identified.
11. **Strategies Turned Into Action Plans** – Strategy development without conversion into action plans is merely a mental exercise. To assure that there is a process for implementation of the strategic chosen, we developed goals, objectives and action plans for each strategy.
12. **Development of Appropriate Metrics** – Earlier in the strategic planning process, our team identified the various operating and performance metrics being developed within the Department. At this point, we chose existing metrics or developed new ones that would allow the Department to gauge progress toward the chosen goals and objectives on a regular basis. Doing so provides feedback and assures that the change process continues.
13. **Publish and Implement The Strategic Plan** – The final step in the process was to publish the final strategic plan, commence implementation and set a date for the first review and update of the Plan so as to assure that it remains a living/working document to guide the Department into that ideal future.

7. Responsibilities

To the Residents:

We owe the residents of the Vista Fire District the highest quality of service possible, characterized by pride, professionalism, community-focused delivery and public trust. We will treat every resident with the utmost dignity and respect; ensure our equipment is always in superior working order and ready to respond to meet the customer's needs; learn our "profession" to the best of our abilities; strive to deliver a personalized customer service experience on every response; and maintain the public trust through the highest levels of responsibility and accountability.

- Be humble, be tactful, be responsible, and be nice
- Be fiscally responsible
- Learn your "profession"
- Perform weekly and monthly truck and equipment checks
- Ensure your personal protective equipment is in good condition
- Strive to meet or exceed expectations defined in this strategic plan
- The customer is the reason we are here
- Welcome members of the community to join our ranks

To the Fire Department:

We owe the Vista Fire Department our fullest commitment and dedication. We will always look beyond the traditional scope of our individual positions to promote teamwork, innovation and organizational effectiveness. We will work through the chain of command to resolve issues at the lowest possible level of the organizational structure; prioritize our goals and objectives to most effectively meet the fire department mission; demonstrate the highest levels of personal integrity; be accountable for our decisions; and strive to learn our profession to the best of our abilities.

- Curtail any culture of negativity
- Work together as a unified entity
- Work within the chain of command
- Set high standards
- Maintain the appearance of equipment and facilities
- Place the good of the department ahead of personal gains
- Follow rules, regulations, and procedures
- Look professional
- Respond to 10% of all alarms
- Attend 25% of departmental drills
- Get involved with a committee or shift activity
- Perform an 8 duty shift per week (EMS)
- Be adaptive to the changing needs of our customers, internal and external

To Each Other:

We owe each other an environment characterized by trust and respect for the individual, fostering open and honest communications at all levels, and personal accountability for our actions.

We will work hard to develop a culture of unity, treating one another with dignity and respect, leading by example, promoting participative management, fostering open and honest communications at all levels. We will be accountable to one another and do our best to recognize and reward those who go beyond our day-today expectations. We will treat our second family as we treat our first.

- Treat everyone with dignity and respect
- Be tolerant of other people's thoughts, opinions and differences
- Mentor and help train new fire fighters
- Recognize the contributions of others
- Reward the contributions of others
- Open and honest communications and feedback

- Perform your duties, do not leave them for someone else
- Lead by example
- Don't ask someone if they need help, help them
- If you mess it up, clean it up

To Ourselves:

We owe ourselves personal and professional growth. We will seek new knowledge and greater challenges, and strive to remain at the leading edge of our profession.

We owe it to ourselves to be the best we can be, striving to gain greater knowledge and experience in our profession, going beyond meeting minimum standards bust striving to meet departmental expectations. We realize we are an extension of the fire department in our personal and professional lives and shall always act in a manner that is consistent with the values of the organization, demonstrating the highest levels of pride, professionalism, integrity, and accountability.

- Maintain fire fighting skills and update regularly
- Get involved
- Become a certified FF1 or EMT
- Communicate effectively
- Be physically and mentally fit

8. Stake Holders

Internal Stakeholders

- Volunteer Firefighters
- Volunteer EMTs
- Fire Chief and other chief officers
- Company officers
- Associate Members

External Stakeholders

- Board of Fire Commissioners
- Residents
- Lewisboro Emergency Management
- “Drive-thru” customers
- K-L School System
- Public/private utilities
- Religious groups/organizations
- Neighboring fire departments
- Taxpayers
- Other Town departments
- State and Federal agencies
- Commercial properties, businesses and stores
- Fraternal and civic groups

9. Core Values

- **Protection** – Our primary mission is to provide the highest possible level of protection.
- **Professionalism** – As “volunteer” professionals, we honor the trust and responsibility expected of us.
- **Responsibility** – We will further fulfill our responsibility to the community through involvement, life safety education and delivery of non-traditional services.
- **Empowerment** – Our members are at the core of our organization. We are dedicated to empowering and including them in the decision making process.
- **Resources** – We will use all available resources to solve an emergency situation.
- **Integrity** – We embrace integrity, accountability, selflessness, loyalty, and compassion while continually promoting these values in all of our members.
- **Knowledge** – We increase our knowledge and abilities through training and pursuing technology to work better, safer and smarter.
- **Development** – Our leadership encourages member development and strives to create an atmosphere of goal oriented achievement.
- **Succession** – We believe that officer development and ongoing succession planning are critical to the success of our organization.
- **Family**- We value our family and friends. It is our commitment to consider the community as members of our extended family.

10. Mandates:

Formal Mandates:

- LIFE SAFETY, INCIDENT STABILIZATION, PROPERTY CONSERVATION
- Provide Fire, EMS and Rescue Services for Vista Fire District #1
- Provide Mutual Aid Fire and Rescue Services for NY and CT
- Provide Mutual Aid EMS for NY and CT

Informal Mandates:

- Assist other Civic Groups
 - Assist with Town Fireworks
 - Assist with South Salem Library Fair
 - Assist with Stevens Memorial Antique Fair
 - Charter Agency for Boy and Cub Scouts
 - Assist with St. Paul's Plant Sale
 - Red Cross Blood Drives
- Lewisboro Emergency Management

11. SWOT Analysis

The assessment of internal strengths and weaknesses is the first step in identifying the strategic issues facing the Department. Strengths and weaknesses are controlled, at least partially, by the Department. Through the process of strategic planning, we hope to capitalize on our existing strengths and create additional organizational strengths, while either eliminating or minimizing the impact of our weaknesses.

Strengths:

- We have excellent equipment and apparatus.
- Our members and officers are professional and knowledgeable. They are highly educated, trained and motivated.
- Good overall safety record.
- Teamwork on the incident scene.
- District gets excellent value for the cost of the Department.
- High level of customer satisfaction.
- There is a sense of ownership for activities and responsibilities within our Department.
- Most members and officers are generally willing to do more than is required.
- We do “whatever it takes” to solve the problem when people call us for service.
- EMS quality of care is excellent.
- Progressive senior management /Fire Chief
- Commitment level of our members and officers.
- Technology available to our members and officers.

Weaknesses:

- Membership is below the appropriate/optimal levels.
- The experience level of most of our members in the area of significant incidents and true structure fire suppression is limited due to declining fire responses.
- Some officers lack experience, but continue to move up through the ranks. Poor treatment of members by officers has been noted.
- Many newer members are strong in technological areas, but lack mechanical skills and knowledge/aptitude.

- Limited staffing requires additional training to assure safe operations
- Perception of different rules being in place for different people.
- Lack of preplans for target hazards.
- Lack of officer development and succession planning.

Opportunities

- Educational and training opportunities available to firefighters and officers.
- Federal grants available, but difficult for our Department to secure.
- Ability to reshape our Department to better meet the needs of the future.
- Supportive Board of Fire Commissioners
- Mutual and automatic aid opportunities.
- Community is generally very supportive.
- Positive working relationships with surrounding departments
- Ability to attract new members with a new building
- Working regionally with Battalion 13 for recruitment and retention programs

Threats

- Our mission and responsibilities will, in all probability, continue to grow/expand.
- National (NFPA) Standards are not being met due to limited members and time demands on limited line officer staff.
- Transfer of more emergency management, planning and response activities (man-made and natural disasters) is being shifted from the state and federal government to the local response agencies, with relatively little financial support.
- Changing demographics of the community have resulted in two very different types of citizens, each with vastly different service requirements and expectations.
- Relatively young officers lack the institutional history of the senior-level decisions made in the past.
- High cost of living in Westchester County prohibits firefighters and officers from living close to the community.
- Most residents have multiple jobs not leaving time for 100 hr plus training to be an EMT or Firefighter.

12. Strategic Issues Identified:

1) ATTENDANCE AT CALLS/TRAINING

A) TIME COMMITMENTS

Low attendance due to work, family issues, and other “life” obligations identified as major reasons for the inability to fulfill obligations to calls/training and community events.

Action Items:

- Consider change of drill / meeting dates
- Repeat drills on Sunday mornings
- Survey members on availability

Potential Metrics/Performance Measurements:

- Increased attendance at all department events

B) LACK OF MORALE/COMMERADERIE

Members are aggravated with attitudes/posture (negative, insensitive, demeaning, immature) of other members; especially those in the chain of command.

Overall inability to trust the judgment of the line, based on the above mentioned characteristics of it.

Lack of communication; not enough advanced warning for events, issues, other non-training issues.

Action Items:

- Development of a kinder environment through officer development and leading by example.
- Officer development programs developed.
- Utilize various forms of communication to request members to be more active.

Potential Metrics/Performance Measurements:

- A more positive and rewarding atmosphere for all members.

2) RECRUITMENT/RETENTION

The need to recruit from a more broad pool of candidates; both young and old

- Community Outreach Program
- Adult :Hands On” Open house”
- Job fairs and video segments for advertising
- Follow up with individuals who haven’t been showing up to find out why and how we can help get them back in the loop.

Action Items:

- Participation in Battalion 13 recruitment and retention committee.
- Develop short video with members interviewed about membership for web site, job fairs, open house and other community events.
- Using the LOSAP POINT SYSTEM, identify those who have not attended drills/ meetings and calls/ and follow up with individuals who haven’t attended in a while.

Potential Metrics/Performance Measurements:

- Feedback from phone calls or visits to individuals will help to further define why members join and then stop attending calls, drills and other department events.
- Show if concern for member changes behavior.
- Show if special invitations are required to get members to be more active and make department more of a priority in their lives.

3) OFFICER DEVELOPMENT

The need to train all line officers in the disciplines of management, team building, communication, etc.

- Line officers, or anyone interested in management training, to training classes offered through the Fire Service or other. Also noted was that individuals go one-by-one, not as a group. In house officer training programs created and given to officers.

Action Items:

- Develop Officer Training Programs to include command and control of incidents, personnel management skills, training of members, and planning for the future.
- Develop a professional development program
- EMS promotional opportunities need to be made available

Potential Metrics/Performance Measurements:

- Members respect for our officers based on trust, fair treatment, and appreciation of volunteer members..

4) MENTORING

The need for a program which allows for personal goal tracking and progress of each member, whether fire or EMS.

- Develop a goal tracking sheet for the Officer in charge.
- Develop a personal goal tracking sheet for the member
- Develop a feedback system

Action Items:

- Revise and implement departments mentoring program.
- Develop tracking chart that will be placed on wall in chief's office to track members' status.
- Develop a feedback system for members to report need for training, gear, other requests.

Potential Metrics/Performance Measurements:

- New members adapt to Department Policies and Procedures quicker
- They are not left to figure things out for themselves
- % of new members still active 1 year after joining Department

5) POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT VS. NEGATIVE PUNISHMENT

The need to AWARD those who deserve to be recognized instead of chastising the one's who can't fully participate.

Action Items:

- Praise in public, reprimand in private
- Focus on things done right, not just things done wrong.
- Awards program / Dinner

Potential Metrics/Performance Measurements:

- More positive environment

6) FEEDBACK / CUSTOMER SERVICE

Develop a customer survey to send to all occupancies we respond to in district.

Use this information to improve service

Use feedback to advise members how public feels about the services we provide.

Action Items:

- Develop customer service survey
- Share results with members
- Use feedback to correct or improve operations

Potential Metrics/Performance Measurements:

- % of surveys returned.
- Degree of satisfaction of customers.

7) HEALTH AND SAFETY

Appoint a department Health and Safety Officer

Action Items:

- Appoint H&S Officer
- Identify and correct issues noted in departments Risk Management Plan

Potential Metrics/Performance Measurements:

- Appointment and proper certification of H&S officer
- Progress in correcting deficiencies noted in RMP.

8) NEW FIREHOUSE

Move into new firehouse and adapt our operation to larger more functional building. Include public in more firehouse events to regain the “center of the community” status the fire department once had.

Action Items:

- Move in fall of 2010.
- Clean, inventory and prepare for service all equipment that has been in storage.
- Open house
- Dinners / Breakfast fund raisers
- Emergency Cooling/Heating Center, Shelter

Potential Metrics/Performance Measurements:

- Quick return to full service of all apparatus and equipment.
- Utilization of new facility to full potential.
- Community interest and involvement with our department.
- Ability to shelter limited number of residents during emergencies.

9) FIRE PREPLANS, KNOX BOX SYSTEM

Update existing preplans of commercial structures in the district. Perform preplans on those occupancies that have not been surveyed to date. Identify Water Supply Sources in District and in neighboring towns. Knox Box system to be requested for all commercial buildings with automatic fire detection.

Action Items:

- Update existing preplans
- Identify occupancies not preplanned
- Develop water supply inventory
- Request that all commercial occupancies with AFA’s purchase and install Knox Box key safes to facilitate entry without damage after hours of operation.

Potential Metrics/Performance Measurements:

- Number of preplans available on all response apparatus

- Knowledge of our members and surrounding mutual aid companies on water supply sources in and adjacent districts.
- Number of commercial occupancies with Knox Box key secure systems installed.

10) STANDARD OPERATING GUIDELINES

Update and add to department standard operating guidelines. Existing SOG's are 5 yrs old.

Action Items:

- Review existing SOG's
- Identify new SOG's required

Potential Metrics/Performance Measurements:

- Compliance with Risk Managements Plan, OSHA, PESH, NFPA standards and operational procedures unique to our district.

13. Closing Comments

Many hours of work have been input by the members of the Strategic Planning Committee and Officers over the past 6 months in the development of this plan. While it is not assumed to be perfect, we believe that it accurately describes the condition of our department and the initiatives necessary for us to be even more successful meeting the needs of our internal and external stakeholders over the next five years.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank our members who took the time to provide the input needed to develop this plan and guide our Department's growth for the next 5 plus years.

The Vista Fire Department Strategic Planning Committee August 2, 2010