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Chairman Marty W. Smith
Carroll County Board of Commissioners
P.O. Box 338
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March 1, 2019

Chairman Smith,

Please find enclosed the Assessment Report for Carroll County Fire Rescue. The report recognizes several accomplishments by Carroll County Fire Rescue including the achievement of obtaining a Public Protection Classification of a Class 3 by the Insurance Services Office. The personnel within Carroll County Fire Rescue provide professional service to the citizens to which they respond in their time of need.

I would like to commend Fire Chief Tim Padgett and the personnel of Carroll County Fire Rescue. Chief Padgett and all the department personnel were very responsive to any request I submitted and their willingness to professionally participate in this process is a testament to the caliber of personnel within the department.

The assessment was conducted without any interference or any effort to influence the report by any member of Carroll County Fire Rescue or anyone affiliated with Carroll County Government.

The assessment focused on key areas developed through individual interviews with members of the department and group shift meetings conducted early in the process. During the process several strengths and several areas of improvement were identified. The top three strengths were identified as Equipment, Personnel and Brotherhood. The top three areas for improvement were; Training, Communication and Leadership.

A total of 15 recommendations are included within the report. These recommendations include:

1. A recommendation concerning equipment replacement.
2. A recommendation concerning department personnel and the brotherhood.
3. At total of six recommendations concerning department training.
4. A total of four recommendations concerning communication within the department.

5. A total of two recommendations concerning leadership.
6. A recommendation concerning salaries and benefits.

I hope that you and the Board of Commissioners find these recommendations beneficial to the personnel of Carroll County Fire Rescue and ultimately to the citizens of Carroll County

Thanks for this opportunity to spend time with such a great organization as Carroll County Fire Rescue and to be able to assist in possible future improvements to the department.

Sincerely,

Gary L. Thomas

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**Report to the Commission Chairman
Assessment of Carroll County Fire Rescue**

By

**Gary L. Thomas
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Introduction

On September 11, 2018 Chief Scott Blue with Carroll County Fire Rescue resigned from the Fire Chief position and Carroll County EMA Director Tim Padgett was named Interim Fire Chief. Chairman Marty Smith of the Carroll County Board of Commissioners requested that I meet with him and Interim Chief Tim Padgett in reference to conducting an assessment of the current status of Carroll County Fire Rescue in order to provide information that might benefit the future Fire Chief.

Carroll County Fire Rescue was first organized in 1979 by Sole Commissioner Horrie Duncan. Mr. Duncan named Tommy Jackson as the first Fire Chief and the department was organized by taking nine local volunteer fire departments and incorporating them into the Carroll County Fire Department. Stations were built, equipment was purchased and a minimum of one firefighter per shift was employed for the original nine stations. Through the subsequent years the department grew to a total of 13 stations with assigned career personnel at the time of this report with one additional station completed without assigned career personnel and an additional station under construction. The department has a responsible history of protecting lives and property in Carroll County and has progressed through the years into an all hazards response department.

The assessment process began on September 16, 2018 and was completed on January 31, 2019. The assessment covered the overall operation of the fire department and specifically focused on areas identified by department personnel during department meetings facilitated by G.L. Thomas and Associates along with Interim Fire Chief Tim Padgett.

We will provide a detailed analysis of the information obtained during these meetings later in the report.

Carroll County Fire Rescue was recently awarded a “3” Public Protection Classification by the Insurance Services Office (ISO). The Public Protection Classification uses a scale of 1-10 with lower numbers on the scale indicating a better score. The ISO uses the Fire Suppression Rating Schedule (FSRS) to determine the Public Protection Classification for Fire Departments. The FSRS is a manual containing the criteria ISO uses in reviewing the fire prevention and fire suppression capabilities of individual communities or fire protection areas. The schedule measures the major elements of a community’s fire protection system and develops a numerical grading called a Public Protection Classification.

The ISO Fire Suppression Rating Schedule employs nationally accepted standards developed by such organizations as the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), the American Water Works Association (AWWA), and the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO) International. When those organizations update their standards, the ISO evaluation changes as well. The Public Protection Classification program always provides a useful benchmark that helps fire departments and other public officials measure the effectiveness of their efforts — and plan improvements. (www.iso.com)

Assessment

An assessment of any fire department, even a Class 3 fire department will produce areas where improvements can be made. The information in this report should not be construed as a formal accusation of any member of Carroll County Fire Rescue or Carroll County. The areas for improvement noted in this report are just that, areas where improvements can be made utilizing standards and processes that are described as “best practices” in the fire service.

The assessment process utilized multiple avenues to obtain information including codes and standards research, fire service publications and reference materials, interviews of Carroll County Fire Rescue personnel and tours of Carroll County Fire Rescue facilities. The author of this report would like to thank the personnel with Carroll County Fire Rescue for their hospitality during the assessment and for their willingness to share information during the process. A special thanks to Interim Chief Tim Padgett for his assistance in providing information as requested and for his willingness to review the recommendations and for his dedication to making Carroll County Fire Rescue the best it can be. The assessment was conducted without any interference or any effort to influence the report by any member of Carroll County Fire Rescue or anyone affiliated with the Carroll County Government.

Stations

Carroll County Fire Rescue operates thirteen stations with assigned personnel at various locations throughout Carroll County. The department also has one station that is ready for operation, but the county has been unable to secure funding for the personnel for this station. There is also another station currently under construction.

These stations are designated by the numbers 1-18 and are located as follows:

- Station 1: 3051 W. Hwy. 5 (Tyus Community)
- Station 2: 188 E. Hwy. 78 (City of Temple)
- Station 3: 3722 Old Hwy. 61 (Sandhill Community)
- Station 4: 58 West DR. (City of Roopville)
- Station 5: 2673 Hwy 16 (Clem Community)
- Station 6: 124 Barrett RD. (City of Bowdon)
- Station 7: 250 Bowdon Junction RD. (City of Mt. Zion)
- Station 8: 50 E. Hwy. 5 (City of Whitesburg)
- Station 9: 74 Industrial BLVD. (City of Villa Rica)
- Station 12: 3048 E. Hwy. 5 (Lowell Community)
- Station 14: 7122 Smithfield RD. (Smithfield Community)
- Station 15: 3200 Hogliver RD. (Centerpoint Community)
- Station 16: 680 Tumlin Lake RD. (North of Temple and Villa Rica)
- Station 17: 2110 Tyus Carrollton RD. (Horton RD and Tyus Carrollton RD.)
- Station 18: 4580 Jones Mill RD. (Hulett Community, Under Construction)

Personnel Assignments

Carroll County Fire Rescue operates engine crews with two personnel per shift on most apparatus with minimum staffing established at no less than two personnel per apparatus. The department utilizes the following personnel assignments on each shift.

Engine 1: Two personnel

Engine 2: Two personnel

Engine 3: Two personnel

Engine 4: Two personnel

Engine 5: Two personnel

Engine 6: Two personnel

Ladder 6: Two personnel

Engine 7: Two personnel

Engine 8: Two personnel

Engine 9: Two personnel

Ladder 9: Three personnel

Engine 12: Two personnel

Engine 14: Two personnel

Engine 15: Two personnel

Engine 16: Two personnel

Engine 17: No personnel

Engine 18: Station under construction

Battalion 1: One personnel, Battalion Captain for South Battalion

Battalion 2: One personnel, Battalion Captain for North Battalion

804: One personnel, Battalion Chief for Shift

Apparatus

Carroll County Fire Rescue operates a primary fleet of 13 Engines and two Ladder Trucks with the appropriate amount of reserve apparatus and support apparatus and vehicles. The department's primary and reserve apparatus are all manufactured by Sutphen Corporation in Dublin, Ohio. This manufacturer is recognized as a leader in Fire Apparatus Manufacturing. The department's primary response apparatus range in age from 1 to 24 years of age. Several primary response engines need to be replaced and the department is currently working through an apparatus replacement program utilizing Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) funds.

The overall condition of the department's apparatus is Fair to Excellent. The department personnel do a good job inspecting and caring for the apparatus each shift. None of the fire personnel interviewed (0%) expressed a concern about the condition of the department's apparatus in light of the current program to replace apparatus.

Personnel Interviews and Department Meetings

Interviews were conducted with the department Command Staff, Chief and Deputy Chiefs individually and then with the Battalion Chiefs and Battalion Captains individually over the course of several days between September 24, 2018 and October 1, 2018.

Most fire departments, including Carroll County Fire Rescue work a 24-hour shift using a 24/48 Rotation meaning each firefighter works 24 hours on shift and 48 hours off shift. This rotation divides the department into three shifts (labeled A, B and C) with an equal number of personnel on each shift when all shifts are fully staffed.

On October 2, 3, and 4, 2018 Shift Meetings were conducted with all personnel reporting to the meeting on the day immediately following their regular shift. Also, on October 9, 2018 a meeting was held with all volunteer personnel currently serving in the department. A total of 93 personnel attended the meetings including the following for each shift:

A Shift	27 Personnel
B Shift	23 Personnel
C Shift	26 Personnel
Volunteer	17 Personnel

The meetings were held utilizing these divisions as this is the way the department conducts operations daily and is the standard used by most of the fire departments in the United States. The meetings provided an opportunity for all personnel (Lieutenant and lower) to express their feelings about the department, to

describe areas that they felt the department was doing well and also areas where the department needed to improve. At the conclusion of the meetings, each person was asked to complete a short questionnaire that contained two questions;

1. Using your own personal opinion, list the top three strengths you believe exist in the department.
2. Using your own personal opinion, list the top three weaknesses or areas for improvement you believe exist in the department.

An analysis of the notes from the discussion portion of the meetings along with the information provided in the questionnaires provides very good information about the top three strengths and the top three weaknesses for the department based on the perception of department station personnel. The top three strengths and weaknesses identified were:

Strengths

- Equipment
- Personnel
- Brotherhood

Weaknesses (Areas for Improvement)

- Training
- Communication
- Leadership

We will examine each of these areas in detail within the report, but additional information was also noted from the department meetings and the questionnaires. The details for the department as a whole and broken down by career and volunteer are listed below:

All Personnel (Career and Volunteer)

Department Total Career and Volunteer			Department Total Career and Volunteer		
93			93		
Strengths	Number	Percent	Weaknesses	Number	Percent
Equipment	50	54%	Training	36	39%
Personnel	40	43%	Communication	27	29%
Brotherhood	32	34%	Leadership	26	28%
Public Trust	12	13%	Consistency	16	17%
Leadership	6	6%	Brotherhood	16	17%
Training	4	4%	Accountability	13	14%
Company Training	3	3%	Pay	13	14%
Minimum Staffing (2)	2	2%	Retention	7	8%
Accountability	1	1%	Minimum Staffing (4)	5	5%
Free Time	1	1%	Trust	4	4%
Physical Fitness	1	1%	Morale	4	4%
Stations	1	1%	Transparency	3	3%

Volunteer Personnel Only

Volunteers			Volunteers		
17			17		
Strengths	Number	Percent	Weaknesses	Number	Percent
Equipment	8	47%	Brotherhood	8	47%
Personnel	6	35%	Communication	5	29%
Brotherhood	6	35%	Retention	5	29%
Training	4	24%	Leadership	3	18%
Leadership	1	6%	Training	3	18%
			Consistency	2	12%
			Pay	2	12%
			Morale	2	12%
			Accountability	1	6%
			Transparency	1	6%

Career Personnel Only

Department Total Career Only Strengths			Department Total Career Only Weaknesses		
	Number	Percent		Number	Percent
Equipment	50	66%	Training	36	47%
Personnel	40	53%	Communication	27	36%
Brotherhood	32	42%	Leadership	26	34%
Public Trust	12	16%	Consistency	16	21%
Leadership	6	8%	Brotherhood	16	21%
Training	4	5%	Accountability	13	17%
Company Training	3	4%	Pay	13	17%
Minimum Staffing (2)	2	3%	Retention	7	9%
Accountability	1	1%	Minimum Staffing (4)	5	7%
Free Time	1	1%	Trust	4	5%
Physical Fitness	1	1%	Morale	4	5%
Stations	1	1%	Transparency	3	4%

Career (A Shift)

A Shift Strengths			A Shift Weaknesses		
	Number	Percent		Number	Percent
Equipment	19	70%	Training	21	78%
Personnel	12	44%	Communication	17	63%
Public Trust	6	22%	Leadership	11	41%
Brotherhood	4	15%	Pay	9	33%
Minimum Staffing (2)	2	7%	Minimum Staffing (4)	5	19%
Accountability	1	4%	Accountability	5	19%
Physical Fitness	1	4%	Trust	4	15%
Stations	1	4%	Consistency	4	15%
			Retention	2	7%
			Transparency	1	4%

Career (B Shift)

B Shift Strengths	23	
	Number	Percent
Brotherhood	15	65%
Equipment	11	48%
Personnel	10	43%
Public Trust	5	22%
Company Training	3	13%

B Shift Weaknesses	23	
	Number	Percent
Leadership	14	61%
Training	12	52%
Communication	8	35%
Accountability	8	35%
Trust	4	17%
Pay	4	17%
Minimum Staffing (4)	4	17%
Retention	3	13%
Complacency	2	9%
Physical Standards	1	4%

Career (C Shift)

C Shift Strengths	26	
	Number	Percent
Equipment	12	46%
Personnel	12	46%
Brotherhood	7	27%
Leadership	5	19%
Free Time	1	4%
Training	1	4%
Public Trust	1	4%

C Shift Weaknesses	26	
	Number	Percent
Leadership	12	46%
Training	12	46%
Consistency	10	38%
Brotherhood	8	31%
Accountability	7	27%
Communication	5	19%
Pay	2	8%
Morale	2	8%
Transparency	1	4%

Strengths

The top three strengths identified by all personnel (Career and Volunteer) were:

1. Equipment

During the department meetings, 54% of the personnel who completed the questionnaire indicated that **Equipment** was a strength of the department. This was detailed in conversations and information on the questionnaires to be related to the departments recent purchase of new apparatus, the ongoing apparatus replacement program through SPLOST and the purchase of turnout gear and other equipment through SPLOST and different grant programs. While this was currently listed as a strength, equipment had been indicated as a weakness for the previous several years when the department did not replace any apparatus. This had changed within the last 18 months prior to this assessment.

Recommendation 1 – Equipment

The Fire Chief should continue the current practice utilizing SPLOST and available Grant Funding to replace the department's older apparatus and associated equipment. This would also include the timely replacement of Turnout Gear, Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) and other equipment to protect the health and safety of fire personnel.

2. Personnel

During the department meetings, 43% of the personnel who completed the questionnaire indicated that **Personnel** were a strength of the department. This is generally a perception felt across the fire service as a whole as the life and death situations that firefighters respond to on a daily basis, the large amount of time they spend together in the fire stations, and all of the other things they do together during a shift in most cases promotes an attitude of respect for each other and a feeling of pride in all other personnel.

3. Brotherhood

During the department meetings, 34% of the personnel who completed the questionnaire indicated that **Brotherhood** was a strength of the department. This is directly related to the second strength, Personnel and for some of the same reasons. Fire service personnel have a unique bond that can only be described as a “family” due to the time they spend together and the possibility that they may have to save one of their “brothers or sisters” lives at any given time. Even departments that have suffered low morale or extremely trying circumstances, generally stand firm in the brotherhood and this brotherhood general lasts long after members have gone to other positions or retired.

Recommendation 2 – Personnel and Brotherhood

The Fire Chief should continue to promote the “brotherhood” within the department and encourage personnel as often as possible to remain true to each other, respect each other and express servant leadership whenever possible, putting their brother or sister firefighter’s needs above their own.

Weaknesses, Areas for Improvement

1. Training

During the department meetings, 39% of all personnel who completed the questionnaire indicated that **Training** was a weakness of the department. 47% of career personnel indicated that Training was a weakness of the department. Additional information gained about this topic indicated that training was not consistent across all three shifts, organization within the training division was lacking as a training calendar was not posted well in advance of training with some personnel being notified of training on the actual day of the training with limited time to prepare to attend. It was also noted that different instructors used their own outlines and there was freelancing with departmental training with some shifts covering basic items and some shifts covering more advanced techniques when the training was to be the same for all shifts.

There were also indications that personnel were not treated equally during training evolutions with some personnel allowed to “get by” the best they could, and others would be sent home if they could not complete the training. For any that could not complete certain training evolutions, there would not be a firm plan on how to help those personnel to improve to be able to complete the training evolutions in the future.

Physical fitness requirements were also discussed during the interviews and the department meetings. There was not clear direction of how to implement a physical

fitness standard and how to work toward that standard to promote the Health and Safety of all department personnel. It has been stated that the amount of energy expended by a firefighter during fire suppression activities inside a burning structure exceed those of NFL players during a close ball game. Firefighter health and fitness programs are a very important part of the overall employee program for fire department personnel. According to John Matzer Jr. and Paul M. Whisenhand in Managing Fire Services, Second Edition. To ensure that personnel maintain the level of fitness required for their work and their overall health, many fire departments have instituted mandatory physical fitness programs designed to improve and maintain strength, cardiovascular endurance, and flexibility; to discourage smoking and to promote weight control. (Matzer and Whisenhand 275)

Recommendation 3 – Training

The Fire Chief should as soon as possible attempt to obtain additional personnel for the Training Division. At a minimum, one additional person should be added to the training division staff to provide an instructor to handle department training daily. This position should be directed to establish the department annual training calendar and should either teach the classes or provide outlines for the classes and then attend the classes to insure consistency and quality. The person chosen to fill this position should have a background in training for the fire service including all areas of Fire Rescue Operations and leadership for Fire Rescue officers. This position would be a position that would eventually move up in the Training Division as the Deputy Chief of Training prepares for retirement.

Recommendation 4 – Training

In the event that the Fire Chief is unable to increase personnel within the Training Division within a timely fashion, the Fire Chief should utilize the Deputy Chief of Operations to assist with department training daily as it relates to Operations section of the department and to help to minimize the inconsistencies in training between shifts. This should only be a temporary arrangement until such time as additional personnel can be added to the Training Division.

Recommendation 5 – Training

The Fire Chief should move the Deputy Chief of Training to a more compliance-oriented role to assist with obtaining and maintaining compliance with the large numbers of personnel that move through the department. The department currently has a high turnover rate which hampers the ability of the Training Division with current staffing levels to maintain frequent high-quality training for veteran personnel due to the constant need to orient, train and certify new personnel. This move to a more compliance-oriented position can occur in conjunction with recommendations 3 or 4 listed above.

Recommendation 6 – Training

The Fire Chief should seek funding through the General Fund Budget to provide compensation for personnel when they attend department approved training outside of the department such as those classes offered by other departments, the Georgia

Public Safety Training Center and the National Fire Academy etc. Training available at other departments and at training institutions dedicated to public safety training can only enhance the ability of personnel within the department to better do their jobs and allows these personnel to share the learned concepts with other department members.

Recommendation 7 – Training

The Fire Chief should explore ways to allow the department to complete as much multi-company training as possible. Multi-company training is described as multiple stations coming together at a common location in order to train together. This movement of units can affect response times within multiple areas; therefore, this type of training requires a great deal of planning within the Operations Section of the department.

Recommendation 8 – Training

The Fire Chief should evaluate the overall physical fitness of the department and begin the process to seek professional assistance to develop physical fitness standards for the department and to begin the process for personnel to work toward compliance with the physical fitness standard.

2. Communication

During the department meetings, 29% of all personnel who completed the questionnaire indicated that **Communication** was a weakness of the department. 36% of career personnel indicated that Communication was a weakness of the department. Information provided by personnel during department meetings and individual interviews indicated that communication is not consistent across all three shifts and in some cases appears to not filter down to station assigned personnel on any shift. It was noted by some shift personnel stated that they routinely receive updates from officers about topics of interest within the department while others indicated that they never receive communication. It was noted that memos were almost non-existent and might only be received when something “bad has happened” within the department.

Recommendation 9 – Communication

The Fire Chief should continue the practice of a Daily Briefing at Headquarters at shift change in order to facilitate communications between the shift supervisors and the Command Staff. This Daily Briefing allows each shift supervisor to obtain information directly from the Command Staff and then disseminate that information to the field personnel.

Recommendation 10 – Communication

The Fire Chief should create a Daily Pass On between officers within the department and expand that pass on to station level officers in the future. The Pass On should contain a brief summary of items that occurred on the previous shift, items that are currently outstanding and any information about larger scale incidents that occurred on the previous shift.

Recommendation 11 - Communication

The Fire Chief should implement a system to distribute memos to the individual stations and establish a designated location within each station where memos are reviewed and should require personnel to check this “memo area” each shift for information that may have been disseminated from the Command Staff since their last shift. As soon as possible, the Fire Chief should move this “memo area” to an online or network-based solution so that information can be transmitted to each station in a timelier fashion.

Recommendation 12 - Communication

The Fire Chief should initiate a process where the department members can attend meetings with the Fire Chief at a minimum of once per year for the Chief to report about the vision and direction of the department and to field questions directly from personnel about the overall operation of the department and the short term and long term goals for the department.

3. Leadership

During the department meetings, 28% of all personnel who completed the questionnaire indicated that **Leadership** was a weakness of the department. 34% of career personnel indicated that Leadership was a weakness of the department. As was noted during the introduction to this report, the resignation of the Fire Chief prompted this assessment. The Commission Chairman wanted to identify areas of strengths within the department and also areas where improvement was needed. Carroll County EMA Director Tim Padgett was named Interim Fire Chief on September 11, 2018 and the Interim Fire Chief title was removed on November 14, 2018 when Padgett was appointed as Fire Chief. While the change of leadership at the Fire Chief level could certainly go a long way in increasing the effectiveness and the respect of Leadership, the perception of leadership goes much deeper. During the individual interviews and the department meetings it was noted that the department currently had a very fragmented system of Standard Operating Guidelines (SOG) and that there were multiple versions of some of the guidelines which created confusion about guidelines for the department and inconsistencies in how situations were handled. It was also noted that the promotional process had changed multiple times within the department and that there was also confusion with the promotional process and the requirements for promotion.

Recommendation 13 – Leadership

The Fire Chief should draft a complete new set of Standard Operating Guidelines (SOG) and Procedures for the department operations. The process to draft these guidelines should seek input from department officers and also from personnel at the firefighter level. The guidelines should be established in a format where they can be assessed easily by officers and field personnel and all personnel should train regularly using these guidelines. Officers should use these guidelines whenever applicable to any given situation to promote consistency throughout the department. The guidelines should be open to review and updating as needed.

Recommendation 14 – Leadership

The Fire Chief should establish a written guideline for promotion of personnel within the department rank structure that contains clear directions for personnel to obtain the necessary training and experience to challenge promotional exams and assessment centers. These promotional guidelines should be incorporated into the department Standard Operating Guidelines (SOG) and make accessible to all personnel for review and consideration as they plan their future within the department.

Salaries and Benefits

The issue of salaries and benefits did not rank in the top three of strengths or weaknesses for the department but it is common knowledge that the department has suffered a large amount of turnover of personnel over the last 24 months and this has created a very “young” department as it relates to fire service experience. Carroll County has been called a “training ground” for Metro Atlanta departments for many years and most recently departments closer to Carroll County have increased their salaries and benefits. While this may not be perceived by all department members as a top issue within the department, it is believed that this is a larger issue than perceived and a recommendation in this area is warranted.

Recommendation 15 – Salaries and Benefits

The Fire Chief should continue to evaluate salaries and benefits for Fire Rescue personnel, specifically benefits that would encourage personnel to remain with the department for longer periods of time. This evaluation should take into consideration the salaries and benefits packages for similar sized Fire Rescue departments. The Fire Chief should routinely present this information to the Board of Commissioners for consideration.

In Summary, Carroll County Fire Rescue is a professional organization that has been successful in providing excellent customer service to the citizens of Carroll County for many years. The recommendations in this report are all items that can be evaluated with multiple solutions to only improve further on the services provided by the department, increase the morale of the personnel within the department, and begin the process of establishing long term experienced personnel within the department.

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