

II. Facilities & Deployment

Goal:

Staff are consistently deployed at stations well located to meet target levels of service throughout the district, balancing the trade-offs of cost, effectiveness, and adaptability.



Values:

Key values that drive planning for facilities and deployment include:

- Support for the District's mission of prompt, consistent, and professional service as stated in the District's Target Levels of Service
- Maintain balance between cost and effectiveness
- Planned station locations are based on long-term trends while maintaining flexibility to adapt to changes in the fire service and community.

Historical perspective:

Both Fire Districts 7 and 8 followed remarkably similar paths in the development of facilities. Each established a centrally located headquarters in the 1950s with satellite stations built in the 1960s and 70s to support volunteer home response.

District 8 provided rental housing for responders in mobile homes at two sites from 1984 to 2007.

With the evolution away from community-based response and toward staffed fire stations, both Districts built new headquarters stations in the 1990's to provide space that could be used for sleeping quarters for on-duty staff, training, and administration.

As reliance on station-based response increased, satellite locations generally fell into disuse and have since been used primarily for storage of reserve equipment and apparatus.

Recognizing that Johnson Point and the east side were too distant to receive satisfactory service from the South Bay station, District 8 developed plans for a new fire station location and purchased property on 78th Avenue NE in 2009. While the District proceeded with obtaining Thurston County approval for zoning variance, failure of a ballot issue to fund the project, the recession, and other factors ended further development of the site. The variance has since expired.

One of the major planning considerations when the two districts merged in 2015 was to establish incident readiness & response (IR&R) staffing deployment based on a 3-station concept: staffing the North Olympia (west side) and South Bay (south side) stations 24x7, staffing the existing Johnson Point (east side) station as feasible, and establishing a new east side station to cover that area in the future.

Both Fire Districts 7 & 8 followed remarkably similar paths in the development of facilities.

The District 8 staffing model of primarily using career staff to cover weekdays and volunteers for nights and weekends was adopted.

Since that time, staffing of the west side station has been inconsistent and no IR&R staff have been deployed to the east side station on Johnson Point. Service and response times reflect the same pattern.

When the districts merged, policy was established on a 3-station concept: staffing 2 main stations 24 x 7 and staffing the existing Johnson Pt. station as feasible.

In 2016, the District received a protection class rating of 5 with tender credits from the Washington Survey and Rating Bureau (WSRB). Credit was extended to the northeast side area based on IR&R members who lived within 5 road miles of the Johnson Point station. Far east side properties received the benefit of being within 5 road miles of Lacey Fire District's Willamette station. Approximately 40 properties at the tip of the Fishtrap peninsula were found to be more than 5 road miles from the North Olympia station and did not receive rating credit.

Before the merger, District 8 planned to develop its old headquarters site on South Bay Road into a training facility to support training at a central location from which on-duty members could still respond to emergencies. This project was planned and work began prior to the merger. Major infrastructure work was completed in 2016.

Due to rural 5-acre zoning restrictions, the District has seen limited growth, mostly in the southeast corner within the Lacey Urban Growth Area. Annexations of portions of this area and others into the cities of Lacey and Olympia have been a regular occurrence. This has reduced the impact of population and property value growth in certain higher population density portions of the District. While the District remains predominantly rural by zoning, it has also become more suburban in character. Following larger demographic trends, the population has become on the average older and EMS requests for service have grown as a percentage of the overall emergency response workload.

Current situation:

Total call volume for the district averages about 900 calls per year. On average, 77% are EMS, 7% are fire, and the remaining 16% are false alarms and public service type calls.

Service on the south side is very good.

Service on the east side does not meet standards.

Service on the west side is inconsistent.

Service on the south side of the District provided out of the South Bay headquarters station, about 44% of calls, is very good. The station is consistently staffed. It is well maintained and in good condition. In order to meet the needs of our increasingly diverse responder population, remodeling the crew quarters to provide individual sleeping areas rather than "bunk house" style sleeping areas is needed.

Service on the east side, about 23% of calls, meets the district's standards only about one third of the time (see reference documents for District service standards). Neither of the two existing eastside satellite stations is designed to support 24x7 staffing and each would require significant capital investment. In addition, none of the existing properties is centrally located on the Johnson Point peninsula.

Service on the west side, 33% of calls, follows the similar pattern as the staffing of the North Olympia station. It is inconsistent – good on weekdays, inconsistent on nights and weekends. The North Olympia station provides good access to the entire west side, but is located about a half-mile too far south to meet the WSRB 5-road mile standard for the tip of Fishtrap. The building’s functionality for staff living quarters and environmental systems will require upgrades due to age and changes in facility use requirements as with the South Bay station. The two satellite properties on the west side would require significant capital investment for use as a staffed station.

The District Training Center is in use as a central location for training. Additional improvements are needed to finish this facility and will be addressed in the District’s Training Plan.

The number of members living in the Johnson Pt. area has dwindled. Residents might lose credit for having a staffed fire station if a WSRB audit were performed today.

The District continues to rely on a mix of IR&R volunteers and career staff to provide coverage. Recruiting is strong but retaining members and developing new competent supervisors and leaders present critical challenges. A staffing plan was conditionally adopted in July 2017 to address these challenges and is in the process of being implemented. Total membership is close to the numbers needed to provide consistent staffing. It is expected that when the changes outlined in the staffing plan are fully implemented (additional volunteer and career staff), two-station staffing should be consistent and sustainable.

Service on the west side is limited by inconsistency of staffing. Service on the east side is limited by the use of the South Bay station for response.

Consistently meeting the District’s service standards is essentially limited by two major factors: staffing and facilities. Service on the west side is limited by inconsistency of staffing. Service on the east side is limited by the use of the South Bay station for response. To meet the District’s current service standards, both improved staffing and locating staff in an east side facility are required.

Future needs:

Relatively slow population growth will result in a limited increase of call volume. Call distribution between sectors within the District is not expected to change dramatically. Distance and response time will be the primary factors that impact planning of future station locations.

By necessity, IR&R staffing will continue to be a mix of career and volunteer. It is probable a roster of more career staff combined with more career-oriented volunteers will result over time as training requirements continue to increase. We will continue to seek and retain long-term volunteers, however, retaining volunteer members long enough to become supervisors and leaders will be an increasing challenge. Due to low call volume, attracting volunteers with outstanding training and mentorship will be emphasized.

Thurston County fire agencies will continue the trend of consolidation. Unless driven by changing social-economic factors, the District is less likely to pursue consolidation with its urban neighbors due to significant financial, cultural, statutory and operational differences. Consolidation is more likely to be a factor if it is addressed on a county-wide basis.

While these long-term trends will continue, there is a possibility of disruptive change to the fire service resulting from technological innovation, regulatory reform, or unpredictable social/economic changes. Such changes cannot be predicted but their possibility needs to be considered in planning.

Strategies:

Different strategies are available to the District for use in meeting its mission and service standards.

Three response stations:

Operating from three response stations (one east, one west and one south) could provide high levels of service, by providing closer proximity to all areas of the District and a central response station on the south side as an anchor. However, given the challenges of staffing, retaining members, and developing new volunteer leaders, it is unrealistic to expect more than two companies could be consistently maintained. Based on experience, spreading two companies of IR&R staff between three stations has been found to increase the probability of stations being temporarily unstaffed. In addition, staffing three stations with career staff during weekdays would significantly increase labor costs which would be difficult to justify given relatively low call volumes. With three stations, call volume would be spread unevenly between stations. The three-station approach, while utilizing existing facilities, still requires significant capital investment to make stations functionally usable.

Two response stations:

Effective service could be provided from two stations, one centrally located on each peninsula. Call volume would be evenly balanced between stations. The North Olympia station could be used to provide coverage on the west side. The District does not currently have a properly located station that would support this model on the east side. Costs for staffing, facilities maintenance and apparatus would be lower when operating from two stations. However, this would require investment in a new east side station.

If staffing were ever insufficient to staff both stations, crews would need to be consolidated and respond from one station. Service in the vacated area would suffer as there would be no near-by station providing back-up response.

Two response stations with a central stand-by facility:

A third approach is to respond from two stations, one centrally located on each peninsula, while maintaining the central South Bay Station headquarters as a standby station when there is limited staffing availability. This addresses the primary shortcoming of the two-station model but with the disadvantage of additional costs for additional facilities.

This appears to be the most viable approach for the District in the long-term, providing prompt and consistent service, while limiting the need for expensive career staff and scarce capable leadership resources. This approach keeps options for one, two, or three response stations available in the future should the economics, operations or governance of the fire service change. As

Two response stations with a central stand-by facility appear to be the most viable approach.

documented in the staffing plan, it is exceptionally difficult to recruit and retain sufficient volunteers, and exceptionally expensive to hire sufficient full-time personnel to staff three stations. While staffing two stations has proven to be challenging in the short-term, it is attainable and affordable. For these reasons, we have chosen a two-response station with stand-by model.

The District will need to invest time & energy in education and dialogue with the public on planning issues before attempting to make major investments.

The long-term vision for facilities & deployment:

- a) Strategically located fire stations:
 - Two staffed stations, each staffed with a full IR&R company, with relatively equal levels of functionality and staff amenities, one centrally located on each peninsula. Utilize the North Olympia station for the west side. Utilize a new facility at a new location for the east side.
 - Maintain the South Bay station as District Headquarters and as an unstaffed stand-by facility where crews could temporarily consolidate if numbers are insufficient to staff two stations.
 - Complete and maintain the current District Training Center.
- b) Whatever approach is pursued, due to the cost to implement, significant public financial support will be required. The District will need to invest time and energy in education and dialogue with the public on these planning issues before attempting to make major investments.
- c) It is expected that any facilities project would take years to implement. Interim measures to improve service on the east side are needed. Implementing a resident IR&R responder program to attract volunteers who would live in the Johnson Point area appears to be the best strategy for this. Under such a program, the District would provide housing for volunteer responders in return for their capability to respond to emergencies within that immediate area (either from the Johnson Point station or the housing location).
- d) Major capital investments should only be made in facilities that are part of the long-term vision.
- e) Properties that are not part of the long-term vision and are not useful for providing service in the interim should be surplus and disposed of in accordance with District policy with the intent to obtain the highest value possible. The net gain from such sales should be retained for future investment as part of this Plan.
- f) Before investing in new facilities or major upgrades, the District must demonstrate consistent and sustainable staffing of two stations.

Before investing in new facilities or major upgrades, the District must demonstrate consistent and sustainable staffing at two firestations.

Future Planning Considerations

Two topics related to long-term facilities and deployment have been identified for further study and should be considered in planning efforts in future decades when the useful life of the facilities is nearing its end.

- *Replacing the North Olympia station with a new station located further north to provide 5 road mile coverage-reach to the tip of Fishtrap.*
- *The possibility of consolidating the headquarters and training functions on the same property to improve efficiency.*

Objectives:

1. Continue implementation of IR&R staffing improvements to support consistent two-station staffing as per the staffing plan conditionally adopted July 2017.
2. Immediately upon adoption of the long-term strategies noted above, properties that are not needed will be surplus and disposed of for the highest value attainable.
3. By 10/1/2018, begin implementation of a new resident program to help improve Johnson Pt. service on an interim basis.
4. By a date to be determined by the Board of Fire Commissioners, propose a ballot measure for a general levy restoration and lid lift for voter approval to support sustainable staffing of two-station operations.
5. After successful completion of the above objectives and voter approval of the levy to fund sustainable staffing, develop more detailed plans for implementation of the two-station-with-stand-by model including scope, general station requirements, and proposed future process for capital funding, acquisition, and development.
6. Ongoing: actively inform and dialogue with community members regarding the issues related to this Plan through newsletter articles, website postings, formal public meetings, informal local community meetings and other proactive means.
7. Regularly, at least annually, review and evaluate the planned and actual levels of IR&R staffing and actively assess public support for implementing this facilities plan.
8. When the Board of Fire Commissioners determines that a) two-station staffing is consistent and sustainable and b) there is sufficient public support, it will initiate efforts to fund, acquire land, and build a new fire station centrally located on the Johnson Point peninsula and then upgrade the North Olympia station.

Reference Documents:

District map
District Target Levels of Service
Service chart
Station Information pages