Somerset Fire Department

2026 – 2046 Strategic Plan

Facilitated and prepared by

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Executive Summary

The goal of this strategic plan and the process involved is to:

1. Identify any critical issues that require immediate attention.
2. Assess recruitment and retention, addressing current factors and potential future needs.
3. Evaluate if the resources available are sufficient to support current and future operations.
4. Recognize and examine any limitations in resources (personnel, equipment, and capital resources), and
5. Suggest strategies to help the Somerset Fire Department enhance service delivery and reduce limitations impacting resources; prepare for increased demand.

The Village and Town of Somerset provide joint coverage for fire and EMS services to the two municipalities. The existing fire station facility is owned by the Town, and both municipalities share operational costs, with the current split 47% Village, 53% Town. The Village also pays the Town rent to house the fire department there, which has been operating out of the station for over 50 years.

The Somerset regional economy has demonstrated consistent and steady growth over the past several decades.[1] Both the Town's and Village's population has grown significantly since 2000, and it is anticipated to experience continued, if more modest, growth. [2] The Village is actively seeking both business growth through the development of TID's and industrial parks, as well as residential housing growth, as witnessed by ongoing construction of both single and multi-family dwellings. The Town of Somerset surrounds the Village of Somerset and is geographically the largest town in St. Croix County. It borders the St. Croix river to the west. The Town's current preference is to manage its land use, density, and development by requiring minimum lot sizes, specific setback requirements, and other limitations, rather than focus on significant growth.

The primary areas of economic development within the county are areas in proximity to the St. Croix Crossing Bridge and the I-94 corridor. Somerset is about 10 miles from the bridge.

The County's 2024 - 2045 Comprehensive Plan supports growth statistics, and states that due to an aging population, high numbers of residents will be of retirement age over the next 20 years. The County Vision Statement commits to maintaining a high quality of life for its residents, which one assumes includes the availability of emergency services.

A review of the fire department fleet and equipment determined that the apparatus is well maintained and sufficiently new to provide years of service. The oldest apparatus is a 1998 reserve engine. The department strives to get 30 years of service out of their apparatus, versus the National Fire Protection Association's (NFPA) 20-year lifespan recommendation. Run volume and good maintenance make the 30-year lifespan goal reasonable and attainable. All apparatuses appear to meet NFPA health and safety

[1] Village of Somerset 2024 Comprehensive Plan
[2] Town of Somerset 2023 Comprehensive Plan

standards. The lack of a pumper (Quint) with elevated ("master") stream capabilities was noted. Incorporating this common type of apparatus into the fleet will improve firefighting efforts, help protect neighboring structures, and enhance firefighter health and safety.

A SWOT survey conducted with the current membership did not reveal any concerns regarding equipment, response capabilities, or firefighter training, although the absence of a "Quint" was noted. There were requests for organizational development efforts, specifically teamwork-orientated training. The primary concern expressed was the outgrowing of the current fire station in terms of storage and inside training areas, as well as sufficient space to keep turnout gear and a lack of personnel lockers.

Discussions with both internal and external community stakeholders revealed that the Village is pleased with the SFD's services and strongly supports the department. Town stakeholders are also satisfied with SFD services but remain concerned about future fire service costs. Some felt that the Village's greater use of fire department services compared to the Town might create a financial imbalance for the Town. Community support for the SFD is notably high, with respect and appreciation for what the firefighters do. Firefighter involvement in the community helps fuel that support.

Several members of the Town Board considered that permitting the fire department to utilize the open meeting space within Town Hall for training purposes would adequately meet most of their requirements. The fire chief did not share this opinion and stated that it does not meet current needs and is not always available, due to the scheduling of other meetings and events. The fire department's needs are felt to not be their priority.

Most new construction is taking place within the Village, in part at the cost of annexing land from the Town to the Village. The Village is considering building a public safety facility to address its administrative, police, and fire/EMS space requirements, but early cost estimates have sparked concerns. Potential alternative strategies could include constructing this municipal campus in stages to spread out the cost factor. What is proving to be a controversial suggestion is having the Town turn over the entire Town Hall structure to the fire department, with the Town constructing a new Town Hall/Public Works facility. The alternate – building a new fire station and turning the former space over to Public Works is more favorable to the fire department. Another suggestion was to build an addition to the current fire station on Town-owned property. There are mitigating issues with each of these options. Hosting information sessions for the Town and Village Boards and the public will most likely be needed to securer administrative and public support for a future project.

The SFD utilizes ongoing recruitment, with applicants and student interns seeking to join the department. The current facility, however, can only accommodate up to thirty firefighters. Demands on firefighters from home and work can limit availability for fire department responses. A larger pool of firefighters to draw upon would improve overall availability, create depth in trained apparatus operators, and put the department in a favorable position for increasing call volumes. If the fire department is to grow to meet future demand, additional space will be imperative.
Lakeview Emergency Medical Services, which provides EMS services to the Town and Village, would support the effort by offering to run an ambulance out of a facility in the Town or Village, assuming

there is sufficient space for their operation This would significantly reduce response times to both municipalities. It is notable that in April 2023, a $22.9 million referendum supporting the school district was passed, indicating that the communities are willing to support investment in public services when they believe it is warranted.

As the SFD station continues to age and fails to meet the fire department's needs, it is likely that recruitment and retention will also suffer. The lack of adequate space will also have negative impacts on firefighter health and safety, the storage of critical equipment and apparatus, and encouraging firefighters to spend more time at the station, including overnight staffing.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that it is very difficult to create a workable strategic plan that covers a 20-year span, much less a significantly shorter period. There are simply too many dynamics and factors at play that can, and will, change the conditions under which the plan was originally written. This 2026 Strategic Plan attempts to identify the factors that will influence and/or limit, the Somerset Fire Department's ability to provide excellent emergency response in the coming years and decades and provide strategic goals that will help the Department successfully develop programs and services that proactively meet future community needs.

The following strategic goals are recommended for the SFD. The intention is to meet their administrative requirements, response, training, recruitment and retention, and physical building needs for a minimum of the next decade:

I. Prepare an internal document that lists alternative fire station strategies with justifications, including a) the acquisition and/or addition to and remodeling of the current Town Hall building and b) construction of a new fire station along with preferred location(s).

II. Hire a full-time Fire Chief or Fire Inspector

III. Create Junior Officer Positions (Lieutenant) and Apparatus Operators for a more structured chain-of-command and promote firefighter mentorship; this is also an incentive for promotions.

IV. Develop an Outreach Program that addresses current and future department recruiting/onboarding efforts for volunteers as well as community service needs based on increasing candidate/customer diversification and changing population demographics.

V. Work with Lakeview EMS to Identify EMS trends and related deliverables to analyze the community's current and future medical service needs.

VI. Conduct a thorough inventory and review of the SFD capital fleet and response equipment to determine appropriateness, practicality to meet response and firefighting strategies and best practices; incorporate a Quint Pumper into the capital equipment replacement plan.

VII. Develop an Outreach Program to facilitate informational meetings for the Town and Village Boards as well as an open public session to educate on the operations of the fire service and the SFD in particular; inform why current conditions create new space needs and why current conditions can be considered an unsafe/unhealthy work environment.

The timeline for accomplishing individual strategic goals is dependent on their prioritization, the availability of personnel to work on them, and current workloads.

PART I: Introduction and Overview

Village of Somerset

The Village of Somerset is a community with an estimated population of 3,115, located in western Wisconsin about 10 miles from the Minnesota border, 15 minutes east of Stillwater, MN, and 75 miles west of Eau Claire, WI. It is bordered by STH 35 to the west and STH 64 running east/west. A major employer of the area is SMC Ltd., a medical contract manufacturing company. Along with SMC, and due to the Village being located close to Minneapolis/St. Paul metro area, the Somerset regional economy has demonstrated consistent and steady growth over the past several decades.[3]

The Village of Somerset's population as doubled since 2000, growing from 1,556 to an estimated 3,334 in 2025. While the Village showed significant growth from 2000 – 2010, growth has tapered in the subsequent two decades, slowing to 10% in 2025. Regardless, the Village is continuing to grow.

Year	Population	Growth Rate
2025	3,334 (est.)	10%
2020	3,115	18%
2010	2,635	69%
2000	1,556	81%
1980	860	–

Town of Somerset

The Town of Somerset surrounds the Village of Somerset and is geographically the largest town in St. Croix County. It borders the St. Croix river to the west. The Town's population has also increased significantly since the turn of the century, growing from a population of 2644 in 2000 to an estimated 4574 in 2025.[4] While the Town's growth rate is less than that of the Village, the Town is continuing to grow, nonetheless.

Year	Population	Growth Rate
2025	4,574 (est.)	6%
2020	4,291	5%
2010	4,036	53%
2000	2,644	-----

[3] Village of Somerset 2024 Comprehensive Plan
[4] Town of Somerset 2023 Comprehensive Plan

St. Croix County

The St. Croix County 2024 – 2045 Comprehensive Plan supports this growth trend by stating "Since 1970, St. Croix County has experienced some of the fastest population growth in the state; however, being part of the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area, it is clear its future is somehow linked to the vitality of the area. Indeed, amongst the rural population there has been a transformation from a largely farm population to a rural non-farm population."[5] Also noted was the trend of an aging population. Over the next 20 years, many residents will reach retirement age in the county.

About 41% of St. Croix County workers commute to the Twin Cities, however local employment is strong, especially in the manufacturing sector.

The St. Croix County 2024 – 2045 Comprehensive Plan supports this growth trend and also acknowledges that an aging population over the next 20 years will result in a significant number of county residents retiring. It is notable that the County's Vision Statement commits to maintaining a high quality of life for its residents, which mentions education and economic development, but does not mention critical service delivery, such as fire, law enforcement, and EMS. This is not uncommon, however, as emergency service delivery is mostly left to local jurisdictions and often taken for granted.

The primary region the County is focusing on for economic development is along the I-94 corridor and the areas in proximity to the St. Croix Crossing Bridge.

Part II: Department History, Response Statistics and Fire Station[6]

The Somerset Fire Department (SFD), founded in 1933, currently serves a 46-square mile area with a population of over 7,000. With oversight from the Somerset Fire and Rescue Commission, it provides fire, EMS and rescue services. It is an operations level hazardous materials response department. The department is composed of a Fire Chief, Assistant Fire Chief, two Captains, a Secretary/Treasurer and 23 firefighters who are certified at the EMR or higher level of EMS training. The department also provides fire inspections, fire education services, and various community service activities.

The Department operates out of a single fire station that is located at Hwy. 35, just north of the STH 64 intersection. It is the same building as the Town of Somerset Town Hall, and as it is centrally located to both the Town and Village, the fire station has been in service for over 50 years.

Department Apparatus Inventory

- 2 Engines
- 2 Tenders
- 2 Brush Trucks
- 1 Medium medical response truck

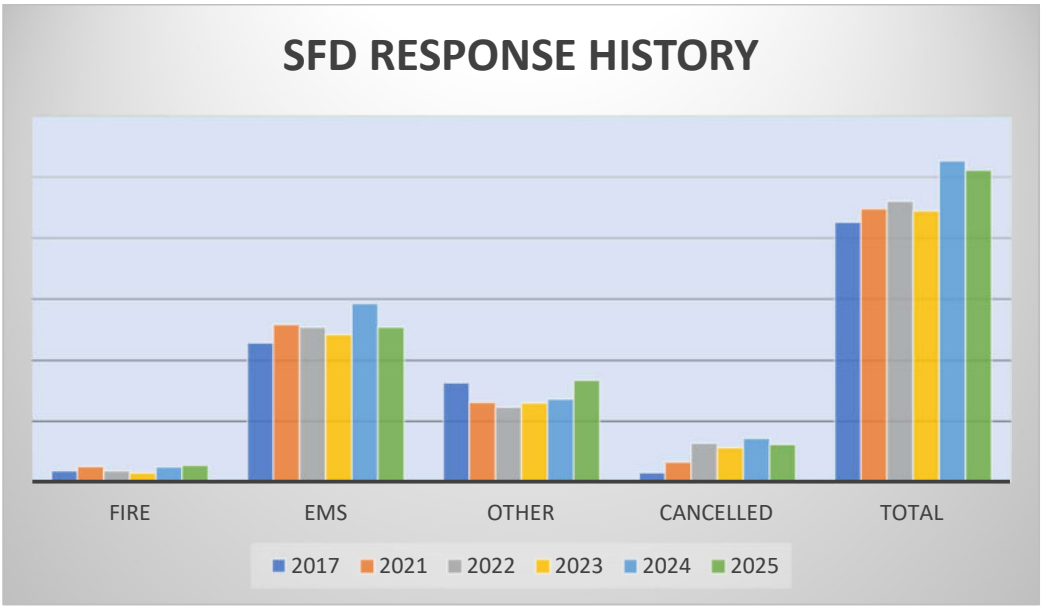
[5] St. Croix County Comprehensive Plan 202402045
[6] History taken from: Village of Somerset Webpage, https://www.

- 1 Utility pick-up
- 2 Polaris Rangers (1 set up for Fire response and 1 for EMS response)
- 2 Boats - 1 Zodiac and 1 G3 Boat

All apparatus appears to be in good operating condition and are part of a regular replacement schedule that is managed by the fire chief. The SFD does not own one strategic piece of apparatus – a pumper capable of an elevated stream via a ladder (sometimes referred to as a "'Quint). Also capable of being utilized for rescue purposes in specific situations, a Quint provides the ability to apply water from a height, which is a very valuable firefighting strategy utilized by most modern fire departments. The SFD is currently dependent on mutual aid in the event an elevated stream is needed to battle a fire. Obviously, the limitation here is whether the apparatus is available. This deficiency is further discussed in Part VII, "Elements for Consideration."

SFD Response Statistics

Fire Department annual response numbers have increased approximately 20% since 2017, and 14% in the past 5 years, and is anticipated to increase commensurate with Village and Town growth.



INCIDENT TYPE	2017	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Fire	19	26	19	15	25	28
EMS	228	258	254	242	293	254
Motor Vehicle Crash/PI	10	13	16	15	6	24
Cancelled Enroute	16	33	64	57	72	62
Mutual Aid (Given)	52	85	73	85	93	94
Hazmat Responses	1	-	2	-	2	1
Other Hazardous Responses	16	18	17	15	17	27
False Alarms	7	10	14	12	15	19
All Other Responses	-	4	-	4	3	2
TOTAL:	**426**	**448**	**460**	**444**	**526**	**511**

PART III: 2026 – 2040 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The multi-faceted approach to the strategic planning process (stakeholder interviews, the survey, and discussions with Town and Village leadership) have identified five categories of strategic priorities, which the strategic goals were developed from:

1. Issues Impacting Operational Effectiveness
2. Preparing for Impacts of Maturing Community and Growth
3. Stability of Workforce
4. Community Involvement
5. Financial Sustainability

Strategic Plan Methodologies

The methodology utilized for the 2026-2046 Strategic Plan follows the industry standard process. Forbes[7] defines the steps as:

1) Assess Industry and Customer Trends
2) Define/Review SFD Components
    a. Mission/Vision
    b. Apparatus Fleet and Equipment
    c. Fire Station
3) Complete SWOT Analysis of the Somerset Fire Department
4) Stakeholder Interviews (Internal and External)
5) Review Financing Options

[7] https://www.forbes.com/sites/georgedeeb/2018/12/04/the-top-6-steps-of-strategic-planning/?sh=6d64c6635b25

PART IV: STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

A review of fire department historical and current data was performed, and feedback was sought from SFD members through the SWOT process. Other stakeholders' perspectives (both internal and external) were sought to determine current customer satisfaction with the SFD's operational effectiveness, and to seek perspectives on the future needs, or lack thereof, of the fire department to ensure meeting long-term operational needs.

SFD Mission/Vision/SWOT

The Mission Statement of the Somerset Fire Department is "To provide the highest quality proactive and reactive Fire/Rescue service of a modern nature. The service shall include but not limited to;[8] public education, inspections and fire suppression. These services are provided via the most cost-effective method as governed by the Somerset Village and Town Boards, and the Somerset Fire/Rescue Officers."

Surveys submitted by the SFD membership indicated a broad commitment to the community, and a desire to help people as their reason for joining the SFD. In addition, the "family" atmosphere and camaraderie that exists, makes the SFD their preferred Department to work on. As in any organization, there were areas where interpersonal conflicts exist, and several members felt that more team building training/exercises would be of benefit. Any conflicts that do exist and are perceived as a weakness do not appear to be impacting operational preparedness or effectiveness.

Members saw the greatest threat to the SFD as being a lack of succession planning or preparing new leaders to take over when retirements occur, and any loss of support from the Town and Village. There were also broad concerns expressed over the limitations of the current fire station.

Fire department members strongly felt that there are significant opportunities for the department to be an even greater part of both communities, and that a strong foundation that supports and promotes the fire department is the key building block for service sustainability.

Town of Somerset Stakeholders

The Town Board held a special public meeting to meet and discuss the SFD with FBTC, and several supervisors also spoke individually with FBTC to discuss SFD current and future needs and service delivery. In general, the Board related that they are satisfied with the current level of service the SFD provides, and that significant changes to the structure and operational components of the fire department were not required at this time. If additional space is a critical need for the SFD to continue to function adequately, then they stated that the Town owned acreage directly behind the current fire station that could be leveraged for an addition to the station, rather than building a new fire station. In addition, it was felt that the Village currently benefits from the SFD more than the Town, as service demand from the Village is greater than from the Town, as the Town and Village have different growth goals. As such, it was implied that if improvements to the SFD were to occur, that the Village should bear the greater responsibility for said improvements.

[8] https://somersetfirerescue.com/about-us/

There was also a question – or minor frustration – expressed as to why a fire department member staffed and staged a piece of apparatus on the fire station tarmac while waiting for personnel to respond to the fire station before responding to an EMS call. While they waited for a second person to arrive and staff the apparatus, the ambulance (which responded from 10 miles away) may have passed the station enroute to the call. (This is an indication that public education on SFD operational guidelines is needed.)

While the resistance to significant change and its associated cost was the general message, it was not unanimous. It was noted that while the Village has more of a history with borrowing money for infrastructure improvements, the Town has not had to borrow money for a long time, and as such, is hesitant to borrow unless the need is urgent. The Town will soon be borrowing to finance a road project, and the desire was to see that debt retired before any new debt would be considered. In addition, the Town saw a significant increase in the 2025 mill rate, and there are concerns about the direction of possible future tax increases that the citizenry will be required to support. As service demands begin to influence the percentage of fiscal support of the Town and Village for the SFD, there is the potential that a delayed investment could favor the Town, saving it money over the current percentage split.

Several Town Board members expressed in individual interviews that the current fire station does not meet fire department's present and growing needs. It was noted that training facilities are very limited in the current building and the Town Hall, and the building itself was not built to comprehensively train in, nor gather people in a social setting. Some SFD members would stay at the station during peak activity periods when river tubing was popular, but the 'apartment' has limited amenities, does not provide private sleeping arrangements, and is generally insufficient by current fire service practices.

One Board member was concerned that the fire department may be in a "keep up with the neighbors" syndrome, meaning that if a neighboring department gets a specific apparatus or equipment, that the SFD feel that they need to match the move, or one-up it. The member said that needs need to be realistic and justifiable. (A counter to this "allegation," was that if the 'neighbors' are making improvements to their fire department to improve firefighting effectiveness and firefighter safety and health, then 'keeping up with them' is not a bad thing – they are doing the right thing, and so should the Town and Village.)

One thought that was presented is that if a neighboring fire department has some type of ladder truck that will provide an elevated stream, then why does the SFD need one, if mutual aid will bring that resource to the scene when needed? The concern with this perspective is that other departments didn't invest in a ladder truck to meet their neighbor's needs. They purchased it for their community, and their taxpayers paid for it. (Unless the Town and Village have something significant to offer that their neighbors need, then this is a one-way benefit and is not a good practice to rely on.)

It was felt that Town stakeholders may benefit from an effort to educate and inform them of current fire service operations, training and educational requirements, and how communities in different settings support their fire department's growing needs.

When asked if the Town was going to grow, the response was: “Yes, but not at the same rate as the Village.” In addition, it was felt that the Village would continue to annex land from the Town, therefore limiting the amount and type of growth the Town will see.

One interviewee stated that when new residents come from outside the area and build in the Town, they bring the expectation of a similar level of service from the Town that they had in their previous community. Frustration is not uncommon among new residents when they realize what services are and are not available or limited in availability. One interviewee that relocated to the Somerset area stated they were ‘shocked’ to find out the fire department was completely volunteer.

If a new fire station was to be built, it was suggested that it incorporate some type of resource available to the entire community, such as a café or coffee shop, and/or facilities that could support things like a new senior center, a farmer’s market, or perhaps a gym that youth could go to and play basketball or other activities. Any proceeds that may be realized would go support the fire department. It was felt that people in the community like supporting something where monies go back to the community.

Village of Somerset Stakeholders

Several Village board members responded to a request for individual interviews. Notable is the fact that Town board members appear to have significantly more longevity in their positions than Village board members. Several of the Village board members interviewed were relatively new to the community (less than 5 years), compared to the Town board members who have been residents and on the board for several decades.

The Village board members interviewed all agreed that the fire department is integral to the community and future community growth. Having the fire station centrally located was seen as a big plus. While the department is integral to the community, it was felt that growth and expansion should be done in a prudent manner.

Staffing, including possible full-time position(s) in the future, along with training, sufficient and appropriate types and numbers of apparatus, along with an adequately sized fire station that meets current and potential future demand are all seen as critical to the fire department’s functioning and growth.

The greatest challenge in meeting the above criteria is funding. (Note: Understanding whatever grant funding may be available, and efforts towards community growth to support a viable fire department should remain at the forefront. Considering the significant recent property tax increase in 2025, relying solely on property taxes to accomplish fire department growth and development becomes challenging without the expressed support of the community.)

Community growth and development was considered a strong plus that works two ways – it is good for fire department growth, and it is a positive that attracts business and new residents to the Village. It was felt that the Village of Somerset is going to experience unique growth over the next decade. New construction is going to maintain or grow over the next 5 years, along with additional annexation potentials. From a business perspective, an interviewee felt that the more equipment and capital you own, the better you can serve the customer. They felt that ‘front-loading’ preparations when they are

best affordable (today vs. 10 years from now), will mean the community is ready to respond to the growth when it occurs. Being proactive is much better than being reactive (with the community finding itself needing to invest in capital improvements quickly without a lot of planning). An entrepreneur can only be successful if he/she is willing to take a risk. At this point, the Village is the entrepreneur seeking to grow its business and needs to be willing to invest in itself.

It was felt that the Village has a strong bond rating, which could be tapped in part, to help pay for fire department improvements. "Now is the time for the Village to be bullish," … as it is in competition with other communities for business and industry. It was felt that the I-94 corridor will expand miles more than anticipated at this time, and as a '4th tier' suburb of the Twin Cities, Somerset has the best geography in the area due to ease and speed of travel (with the STH 35/64 new bridge corridor to MN, and access to I-94).

The fire department isn't a 'necessary evil' that people are stuck with. It is an important emergency service that must be worked with. It is an integral part of the communities it serves and provides critical life and property saving services, along with community education.

Joint Fire Commission

Several members of the Fire Commission were interviewed as well. Their perspective was that success requires commitment long term. A fear was that local leadership may work to accomplish their personal political agenda and then move on, rather than making difficult decisions and supporting accompanying commitments to the long-term benefit of their communities.

There was also a concern that money has been invested in the past on studies intended to help meet local needs through improvements, only to see a lack of any action on the recommendations. It was felt that in-house fighting prevents progress from occurring. If this is true, it should be noted that this is a common challenge many municipalities face. Successful communities find a way to overcome or accommodate the challenges they face.

As a possible solution to current and future space needs, it was suggested that perhaps the fire department should take over the entire Town Hall building, including the public works department's space. Public Works is also outgrowing its space in the building and needs additional bays and infrastructure. Under this scenario, the Town would build a new town building behind the current building instead of a new fire station. If only a fire station was built, it would be as much or more of a financial strain on the Town, and the Town would only own potentially half of it. Or the Town could recoup some of the construction costs over the upcoming decades by receiving rent money from the Village.

It was noted that similar conversations were held 10 years ago, with no action resulting. The feeling was that if a new station had been built, or were overbuilt back then, the community would have more building today for significantly less than the cost factor being considered today.

There was a consensus that people are going to continue to seek out both the Town and Village to live in (albeit from different economic backgrounds), particularly from Minnesota that has reportedly experienced a 16%-32% increase in property taxes of late. It was also suggested that if you build the

necessary infrastructure and support it with strong municipal services, people will come. They may not come if those factors are missing.

EMS Provider

EMS service for both the Town and Village is provided by Lakeview Health Emergency Medical Services, a major provider that is affiliated with Lakeview Hospital. It is an advanced life support (ALS) paramedic service provider that serves the St. Croix Valley area of Wisconsin and eastern Minnesota.

Lakeview EMS operations manager Jon Muller consented to an interview to discuss his perspective on current and future needs and EMS opportunities in their relationship with the SFD. When asked what he saw as SFD's greatest needs in the next 5 years, his first response was "A full-time fire chief or a fire inspector" due to daily responsibilities increasing as growth occurs.

He also stated the SFD and Lakeview EMS provide automatic aid to each other, particularly in cases of car crashes with injuries and possible cardiac events. When asked if SFD personnel should strive for a higher level of EMS licensure (ie: EMT or paramedic), he stated that while paramedic training and equipment could be cost prohibited, if SFD's Emergency Medical Responder's (EMR) wanted to become EMT's, the added skills learned would complement current EMR's proven capabilities and skills. All SFD personnel willingly 'get their hands dirty' when assisting with patient care, and don't simply carry equipment for the EMT's.

So long as EMS response remains adequate for the Town and Village's needs, he didn't feel that the Town or Village should even consider starting up their own ambulance service. Besides the cost factor involved, training time would significantly increase.

While current EMS call volume in the Somerset area does not support full-time EMS at the SFD at this time, he did offer that Lakeview EMS would probably staff an ambulance out of the SFD fire station if they had the capacity to do so and extended the invitation. It would require a dedicated apparatus bay, equipment storage and personnel living Lakre. As part of their larger system, he stated it would make sense to base an ambulance in the Somerset fire department station. There would be no guarantee that the ambulance would always be in station, as backing up other ambulances or performing EMS transfer duties could call them away from the area.

The benefit of having an ambulance in Somerset, however, would provide improved training opportunities (from Lakeview EMS), and the SFD could be more involved in planning processes for various events and long-range EMS planning. While they would strongly consider running an operation out of the SFD, they would need to have the right to refuse staffing a rig at the SFD should conditions change and warrant pulling it out at some point, though he didn't feel that had a high chance of occurring.

The Lakeview Hospital system owns a clinic and property near the current fire station, so staffing an ambulance in the community has been a consideration in previous discussions. Mr. Muller felt that in 8-10 years, or maybe less, call volume of Somerset and St. Josephs combined will justify basing an ambulance out of Somerset. When asked if, in lieu of EMS building a response station in Somerset for their ambulance, would they be open to negotiating some type of lease of a bay and space at the SFD, or

contributing to capital cost outlay, he stated that he could not really comment on or commit to that, but he felt it could be worth discussing with his superiors when call volumes change the demographics of EMS response for Lakeview EMS.

PART V: CURRENT OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES

Based on discussions with SFD leadership, the SWOT analysis results, and interviews with other internal and external stakeholders, the Somerset Fire Department is facing five (5) fundamental operational challenges:

I. Daytime staffing challenges to meet current and future service demands.
II. Limited officer positions to oversee and mentor younger members.
III. Facilities to accommodate current and potential future staffing, operational and administrative needs.
IV. Financial resources to implement solutions to meet the challenges.
V. Opposing growth strategies between the Town and Village.

PART VI: ELEMENTS FOR CONSIDERATION

The Somerset Fire Department's Mission Statement dictates that the fiscal responsibilities of providing emergency services via the SFD falls upon both the Village and Town Boards. It is with the cooperation of the SFD officers, but they can only work within the constraints of the budget process, save for local fundraising efforts that occur outside of the budget.

Interviews with all pertinent stakeholders showed that SFD is operating in an effective manner. Fire department leadership is respected, and there is a strong sense of community amongst the membership. There are pockets of frustration among some members from an interpersonal dynamics'

perspective, but that is to be found in most organizations. Improving communication, organizational development and teamwork training, and sound leadership practices can help reduce any conflicts that exist. An interesting note of concern was presented regarding future leadership, as current officers eventually retire. Are people being trained to become future leaders?

There is agreement among all stakeholders that Somerset, as a region incorporating both the Town and Village, will experience significant growth in the upcoming years. Perspectives on that growth, however, differ.

Village of Somerset

The Village is actively working to support and attract sustainable growth and development (both residential and a diverse business climate), drawing from the Twin Cities metropolitan region. This growth will require additional infrastructure planning.

In 2024 an Impact needs Fee Assessment Update was prepared for the Village by MSA Professional Services, Inc. out of St. Paul, MN.

The following tables are taken from that report, and address population growth and growing land acreage projections:

Comprehensive Plan Population Projections

	Census		Projections					Change	
	2010	2020	2023	2025	2030	2035	2040	Numerical	Percent
V. Somerset	2,635	3,115	3,239	3,430	3,725	3,935	4,100	985	32%
St. Croix County	84,345	96,985	99,929	104,465	111,470	115,692	119,010	34,665	36%

Comprehensive Plan Acreage Projections

	2020 (Current)	2025	2030	2035	2040
Residential	340.8	363.6	384.9	400.1	412
Commercial	398.8	425.5	450.4	468.2	482.1
Industrial	126.8	135.3	143.2	148.9	153.3
Institutional*	150.0	155.0	160.0	165.0	170.0

Both of these projections, taken from the Village's Comprehensive Plan, indicate the type of growth it is expected to experience, and the additional area the Somerset Fire Department will be responsible for.

Town of Somerset

The Town on the other hand, wants to limit Town growth, preferring a more balanced approach involving residential, agricultural and commercial interests, while managing their infrastructure. Town stakeholders interviewed preferred the larger residential parcels and rural settings that currently compose it. Agricultural farming has decreased over the years. One Town interviewee indicated that of the current four (4) farms currently operating within the Town, two (2) of the farms will cease operations in the near future, with the acreage most likely being sold for residential development. One interviewee indicated that they have received calls from individuals in Minnesota that are looking for rural acreage to build a home on. The Town is also losing acreage to annexation by the Village, which is also felt to threaten the rural character of the Town.

Conflicting Strategies

While the Town encourages the growth of high-value single-family residents, the Village is experiencing the construction of more affordable single and multi-family dwellings, as well as commercial business infrastructure. The Town's single-family homes can be valued in the mid-to high six figures or even a million dollars or more, whereas the Village's homes are built more modestly, and in greater numbers. These two perspectives are at face value, conflicting strategies. With both municipalities sharing the same fire department, this can be challenging when trying to plan for future service needs, particularly long-range planning.

St. Croix Crossing Bridge

The St. Croix Crossing bridge has experienced significant increases in traffic since it opened in 2017, as it created a new and more direct route between St. Croix County, WI, and Washington County, MN. According to an Internet search, upon opening the bridge averaged approximately 28,000 vehicles per day, an approximate 65% increase over the 17,000 – 18,000 vehicles that used the old two-lane lift bridge that was replaced by the project. By 2019, traffic volumes had increased an additional 20%. The bridge was engineered to accommodate about 71,000 vehicles daily, providing significant room for future growth. A significant portion of this growth may come from work commuting between Wisconsin and Minnesota, or vice versa. It is estimated that a substantial percentage of the population in the St. Joseph/Somerset area currently commute to MN for work.

Traffic forecasting information for the MN Hwy. 36/WI Hwy. 64 corridor can be obtained from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation. For discussion purposes of this report, it is assumed that the available public information supports the view that the Somerset area has and will continue to see significantly increased traffic along the corridor, and that as such, will be a positive influence on future growth due to the direct transportation route to eastern Minnesota from Wisconsin, and from Minnesota to western and central Wisconsin.

Assumption of Growth

With the STH 64 corridor into western Wisconsin, it can safely be assumed that some level of growth will occur in the greater Somerset area during the upcoming years. In 2017, about six out of 10 workers living in St. Croix County traveled at least 20 minutes to work. The highway infrastructure improvements such as the St. Croix Crossing bridge between Wisconsin and Minnesota will attract Minnesota families seeking the type of residential settings that St. Croix County provides, including within the Town and Village of Somerset.[9]

The type of and amount of development will be influenced by the approaches the municipalities take to attract it. The Village's current comprehensive plan makes it clear that it will be placing significant effort into attracting business, population and tourism growth. This kind of growth is possible in the Village, where in the Town it currently would not be, due to their philosophy and desire to maintain a more rural setting for their residents.

Therefore, this Strategic Plan attempts to address various strategies that may help the Somerset Fire Department to evolve in this environment, and to be prepared to service this growth.

Mutual Aid

Mentioned several times was the viewpoint that mutual aid can provide resources that the SFD doesn't have, such as a ladder truck, or elevated stream. As mentioned previously, this is a dangerous road to go down and strictly depends on the availability of the resource needed, and the tolerance of the community that is providing it. The danger with this perspective is the fact that communities do not purchase apparatus to send out on a regular basis to other fire departments that choose not to invest in a piece of apparatus themselves. Communities purchase apparatus to first protect their own community, and secondly to offer mutual aid as a good neighbor. If a different strategy is evolving, then the regionalization of fire service within the County should be considered.

To assume that other communities will continually send out their equipment because the Town and Village do not want to invest in an apparatus themselves is not a reasonable assumption for long-term operational needs. Ultimately there may be an ongoing cost factor involved in one way or another, and there is no guarantee that the apparatus will be available when Somerset needs it, or that the agreement will continue indefinitely.

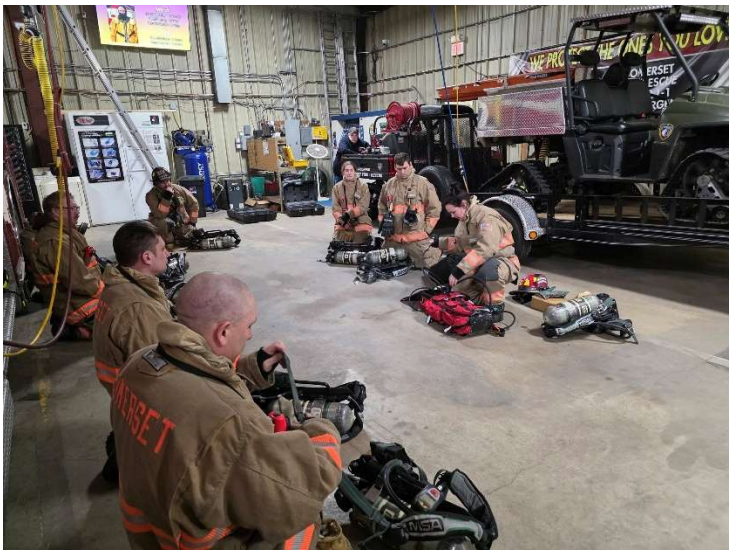
[9] https://uwrfjournalism.org/2019/07/transit-and-transportation

Mutual aid is a state of reciprocity. When each department has similar resources, just not enough of them to deal with an emergency, then their neighbors come to assist. It is a 2-way street. When one agency relies solely on its neighbors for a specific piece of equipment or apparatus that they have chosen not to purchase for themselves, then there is no reciprocity. There is nothing of value to give back, unless said department has a special piece of equipment themselves, that they provide when needed in return. This situation should carry with it a detailed agreement, so all parties are treated equitably.

As previously mentioned, the other option is to regionalize fire service by integrating all the area fire departments together, so it becomes the region's equipment and not that of a specific department, and equipment may need to be relocated. This strategy carries with it significant challenges itself and would require an agreement between multiple agencies on multiple aspects of service.

SFD Preparedness

The SFD, like all fire departments in the State, are subject to State training requirements and national standards that guide both career, combination, and volunteer fire departments. Fire service response requirements have evolved from a narrower scope of structure and vehicle fires to medical responses, complex extrications, confined space and above ground rescue, hazardous materials response, EMS response and more. Asking the volunteer of today to agree to train and respond to this variety of calls, while maintaining required training and proficiency levels, all of which will interfere with their personal and family life can be very challenging.



Recruitment and Retention

Recruitment and retention for today's volunteer fire departments have also changed over the decades. In the past, motivation may have focused on the social aspects and esteem accompanying the job. Training and certification requirements were fewer. Today's volunteer firefighters are required to attain and maintain a higher level of certifications in multiple skillsets, just like full-time firefighters are. While there is still a strong social aspect to the job, the primary reason given for volunteering is to help and contribute to the community. Today's volunteers are considered professionals, like their career counterparts. Community appreciation and support of their efforts is a strong motivational factor for volunteers.

SFD Apparatus Fleet; Master Stream Capability

As previously stated, the SFD Apparatus Fleet appears to be adequate and in good condition, save one consideration – it lacks a pumper able to establish an elevated ("master") stream for fire combat operations on both commercial and residential buildings. An elevated stream is used by the fire service to provide high volumes of water from a height, which can provide a rapid knockdown of the fire, protecting firefighters from other risky operations. In this manner, water can be applied directly into upper-level windows or onto roofs, presenting a significant tactical advantage over ground-level lines.

Most current elevated streams are provided by a pre-piped nozzle mounted on a ladder (length of ladder and nozzle type is the preference of the fire department). They can be controlled remotely, providing a 360-degree rotation, resulting in a less physically demanding and safer working position for the operator as well as the firefighters working the fire, reducing or eliminating the need for interior combat operations.[10] A master stream is also effective in protecting fire exposures, with the capability of preventing the spread of fire to adjacent structures.

[10] https://www.facebook.com/TCESD1/posts/today-crews-trained-on-the-rapid-deployment-of-elevated-master-streamselevated-m/1201249892038939/

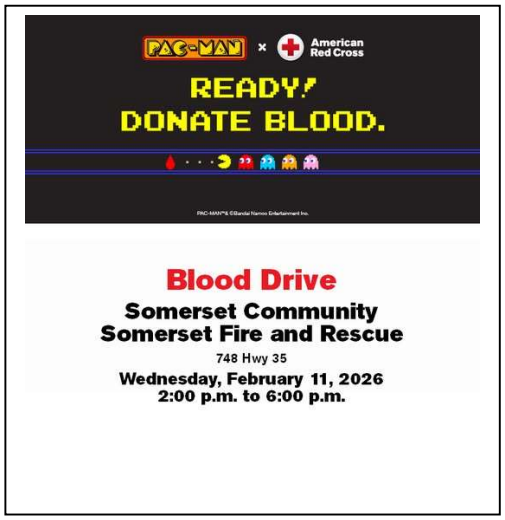
The SFD recognizes the value and need for a pumper with this capability and is willing to explore ways of affording one. As this is a common piece of apparatus in the fire service, there is the possibility of purchasing either a new or pre-owned "Quint," depending on which direction the SFD, Town and Village of Somerset might choose to go.

Local Fundraising

The members of the SFD related their understanding of, and sensitivity to, funding issues to support the Department. Over the past three years, over $58,000.00 was raised through community donations and fundraising efforts (the majority through fundraising) to help fund the fire department, the amount increased each year. It was noted that on at least one occasion, a citizen stated that he did not want to be solicited in the future, as he felt the fire department should be funded through taxation, so everyone shares the responsibility.

FUNDRAISING

	2023	2024	2025
Donations	$957.00	$7,197.00	$7,865.00
Fundraising	$11,920.00	$14,147.92	$16,346.00
Totals	**$12,877.00**	**$21,344.92**	**$24,211.00**



Funding Alternatives

No matter what direction the Town and Village choose to go, it will require significant funding. A previous study recommended adjusting or implementing impact fees for a number of Village projects. This study recommended seeking federal grant funding, as the ability to increase property taxes continues to be regulated by the State (though raising taxes to cover debt is allowed). Another alternative is putting forth a local referendum for funding. In almost all cases in Wisconsin where a local referendum was successful, it was for funding additional staffing, which creates an ongoing expense,

versus a capital improvement project that is anticipated to last many decades. Examples of successful local referendums in Wisconsin include, but are not limited to:

- Butler, Fort Atkinson, Pleasant Prairie, Melvina, Algoma, Seymour, and Washburn; passed referendums for police/fire/WMS services.
- Chippewa Falls ($1.2 million)
- Port Washington ($1.75 million)
- Vernon is seeking a 2026 referendum, proposing a 31.8% levy increase for fire/EMS staffing
- Sun Prairie is seeking a 2026 referendum, proposing $3.95 million for personnel and operational costs.
- Port Washington ($1.175 million to hire 6 full time fire/EMS staff and retain 3 others)

Green Bay secured $5 million in federal funding to build a new fire station and administration headquarters that replaces two closed and outdated fire stations. Their entire project was estimated to cost $19M to 20M, with the funding covering approximately 25% of the total cost. The City plans on breaking ground in the summer of 2026. Funding was secured through the efforts of U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin and Representative Tony Wied.[11]

Local Referendum Example

Residents of the Village and Town are willing financially support public projects that they believe benefit the communities, as evidenced by the April 2023 $22.9 million School District of Somerset referendum. That referendum was to secure funding for capital and safety improvements, capital maintenance, and construction efforts. While the school district also encompasses parts of the surrounding Towns of Star Prairie, St. Joseph and Richmond, it would still appear to require the support of many of the Town and Village of Somerset residents in order to have passed.

PART VII: DISCUSSION

Stakeholder interviews revealed several perspectives and thoughts on the SFD's current and future response capabilities and capacities, and many positive comments reflecting on its overall culture of teamwork and family, and its dedication to the community. Ultimately, all conversations came back to the issue of the fire station currently being beyond capacity to expand without additional building facilities. The lack of space available in the current fire station will be a constraint on service delivery and the future growth of the department that will need to accompany both Town and Village growth in the upcoming decades. *Until this is resolved, it will be difficult to consider other actions to improve service delivery to both communities (in reference to the strategic goals presented).*

Currently the decontamination washer is adjacent to the kitchen area at the rear of the station, directly behind the apparatus. This means that dirty turnout gear must be moved through the station and adjacent to the kitchen to reach the washer, promoting airborne contamination from soot particles on the gear. There is no area set up for clean gear drying. Everything appears to be cramped together to fit

[11] WBAY News; https://www.wbay.com/2026/02/03/green-bay-secures-5-million-federal-funding-new-fire-station/

within the fire station. This is only going to get worse with the addition of more firefighters, equipment and storage needs.

To mitigate the challenge of sufficient space for everything the SFD needs to operate effectively and efficiently and accommodate future space needs over the next 20 years, there needs to be additional space provided. This can be accomplished by either a new construction strategy or by reassigning existing facility resources. Either option has its challenges. The question is, what is in the best interest of the communities' and fire department's long-term needs, and what may be the adverse effects of continuing to delay action on the issue?

Creating and implementing a strategy to help the SFD meet future needs has been a topic of discussion for some time. Several of the parties interviewed recall being part of those discussions a decade ago and stated that there was never a resulting agreement or willingness to invest in the fire department. While it could be argued that *not* spending the money on the fire department a decade ago did not immediately reduce service levels, it did fail to prepare the SFD for needs beyond today (and circumstances have changed since a decade ago). As a result, the same conditions exist now that existed then, only exacerbated by an increase in amount and type of apparatus, equipment, storage requirements and firefighter needs such as turn-out gear storage, personal lockers, living quarters, etc. Having waited a decade, investing in the fire department will now cost significantly more than it would have then (due to the post-pandemic costs of building materials, etc.). If capital monies would have been properly planned and invested a decade ago, a fire station could have been built that would meet the SFD's for another 50 years, much like the current structure has had for the past 50 years.
Failing to invest at this time will create operational challenges that may well impact service delivery within the next several years, and certainly in the future – especially considering both community's comprehensive plans to grow (to different extents), and the type of, and values of, structures that the SFD will be protecting in the future. Construction, apparatus and equipment costs will not go down. Already, what used to be a year-to-18 month wait on a new piece of fire apparatus has morphed into a multi-year wait for an order to be filled, with significant price increases, and no future price guarantee to budget for. With this situation, finding quality used apparatus and equipment has also become significantly more difficult, as all fire departments have apparatus and equipment needs.

Based on past, present, and future Consumer Price Index figures, it can be estimated that building an $8 million dollar fire station (as an example) today, would have cost approximately $3M less 10 years ago, or $5M total. Waiting another 10 years to build, it can be estimated that the same fire station could cost up to $12M, or $4M more than today.[12] Waiting another 10 years will result in an increased cost of $7M, nearly doubling the cost it would have been 10- years ago, and the building would still have a remaining lifespan of at least 40 years beyond today.

One suggestion that came up during the interviews was for the Town to turn over the entire Town Hall building to the fire department, including the public works department apparatus bays. This would provide the SFD with 2 additional apparatus bays and the spaces currently occupied by the Town's administrative offices and the multi-purpose meeting area in the front of the building.

[12] https://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl

While an option, it should be noted that the true condition of the current structure may not be known until remodeling efforts begin. The discovery of a deteriorated or unsafe condition could add significant costs to the project. This would be the case whether the fire department or public works department took over the entire building and attempted to remodel.

The current building makes creating larger apparatus bays, employing contamination controls, revising current layouts, and updating infrastructure such as HVAC or electrical, difficult and would require significant tear-out and rerouting of utility runs for various areas. There are also limited improvements that can be made to the upstairs living area due to its size and being significantly detached from the working part of the station.

As community demand for service increases, and as legislative oversight requires increased preparedness though certifications, training and standards, the fire department is going to have to evolve. Potential improvements may include private sleeping quarters, dedicated space for fire department training and the storage of training equipment, a kitchen that is not in the apparatus bay area and a separate area for gear decontamination (washer/dryer), as firefighters cannot take it home to decontaminate. It will also require additional office space for administrative and record keeping purposes.

Putting an addition on the current structure is not an ideal solution either. There have reportedly been several additions already added onto the original structure, which has resulted in the present disjointed configuration of the fire station. It would be better to put those funds towards a new solution, instead of perpetuating an old and less effective one.

Part VIII: Challenges and Strategies

Challenge #1 – Daytime Staffing

Strategy: Daytime staffing issues can begin to be addressed by establishing a full-time position within the fire department. This could be a fire chief position or a fire inspector position for example. A full-time position will provide the Village with a daytime/work week on-site administrative person that can perform management functions (such as budget, maintenance, planning, or public education and relations), address daily challenges that arise, as well as allow fire safety inspections of local businesses and specific multi-family dwellings as required by the State of Wisconsin's department of Safety and Professional Services (SPS). As the Village receives fiscal reimbursement and support from the State for these inspections in the form of "2% Dues," it is critical that these inspections and required follow-ups are completed and maintained on an ongoing basis.

Being on duty during the day when calls come in would also allow an immediate first response to size up the scene (be it fire or EMS) and advise incoming units of the situation, and call for mutual aid more quickly, should it be necessary. While law enforcement may currently provide this service, having a trained fire/EMS person analyze the needs of the scene is preferable. In addition, the Village police force is also limited in staffing, so there is no guarantee that an office may be available when a call comes in. If one is available, then there is the advantage of having two public safety personnel on scene quickly.

Challenge #2 – Response Times

Response times are tied to the staffing challenges due to time-of-day, availability and distance of volunteer distance from the fire station, and potential for simultaneous or additional calls requiring added personnel to respond.

Strategy: Recruiting volunteers from the local communities should reduce response times to the fire station, especially after normal work hours. Daytime responders, if they are leaving from work (when allowed), would be impacted by the distance they would need to travel from work to the station.

Challenge #3 – Recruitment and Retention

Recruitment and retention challenges have become a significant challenge for all fire departments in recent years, both career and volunteer. In past decades, the application and testing process was a very competitive process with limited openings per candidate. In recent years, career fire departments have found themselves competing with other fire departments for the best candidates, and there is a current trend of fire departments lowering their pre-requisite requirements for applying for a position. For example, where paramedic certification is a requirement for ALS fire departments, others have lowered it to EMT-B with the offer to train the candidate to paramedic level if hired. Even with that, many career departments are operating below their authorized staffing level.

Volunteer fire departments have a longer history of recruitment and retention issues, as they rely on people who may already have a full or part-time job to volunteer for the fire department in addition to their work and family commitments. With the increased certification and continuing training requirements that state and federal standards either require or encourage, it can add to the already present challenges. In these circumstances several factors can influence the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters and EMT's. These factors include a) community support for the fire department, b) the culture of the fire department – if it is inviting or not, c) adequacy of equipment and training, and d) other factors such as pay and benefits, if any.

Strategy: While recruitment and retention does not appear to be an urgent issue for the SFD at this time, the fire department is limited in how many firefighters it can take on due to space limitations. Continuing to focus recruiting efforts on 1) promoting the culture of the SFD, maintaining an environment that motivates and attracts volunteers, 2) a comfortable and professional environment, and 3) focusing on promoting training and social interaction, including events to support the community, will serve it well. Having more qualified candidates than they can accommodate will be the new issue.

Challenge #4 – Facilities

The SFD operates out of one fire station located at 748 Highway 35. It consists of 6 bays in two separate sections of the building and has served the fire department for over 50 years. The SFD shares a small training room in the Town Hall that also functions as a community senior center. This limits the use to evenings by the fire department staff. While the fire department is making do as best they can, it does

not meet their needs. The SFD requires its own training space to accommodate the unique needs of fire service training, particularly as the department grows.

Fire apparatus and equipment have increased in size, sophistication, and quantity over the past decades, resulting in the need for larger spaces to accommodate everything. The fire service has grown faster than many fire stations over the past 50 years. The SFD is no exception and has worked to make use of all available space to accommodate storage and response needs.

The current fire station is barely meeting the department's immediate needs, and not in a particularly safe and healthy manner. Equipment is stored wherever there is room, including behind and above stairways and adjacent to and within the kitchen and sleeping area. It appears that all usable space within the fire station has been maxed out for housing apparatus, equipment and supply storage. There is no room within the fire station to hold meetings, training, or gathering, and the SFD relies on the Town of Somerset's multi-purpose room for those functions.

Strategy: To mitigate the challenge of sufficient space for everything the SFD needs to operate effectively and efficiently and accommodate future space needs over the next 20+ years, there needs to be additional space provided.

Challenge #5 – Fiscal Resources

The key to success for any major fire department initiative is community support and the fiscal resources required to complete that initiative. There are several options available to municipalities, which individually or through a combination of, can be considered as a resource to support the needs of the fire department. The cost/benefit of each will need to be analyzed by Village leadership.

In the MSA report it states *"The Village of Somerset has a history of being proactive when developing infrastructure for the provision of services to serve new development, as well as serve existing residents and businesses. To do so they have utilized a full range of planning and finance options, including grants, taxes, impact fees and utilities."* As such, the Village has experience in creatively addressing the financial

needs of community-orientated projects. It will take this type of creativity to address the needs of the fire department.

The State of Wisconsin limits municipal bonding to 5% of equalized taxable property value (EPTV). The Village, reporting an EPTV just over double that of the Town, has an approximate bonding limit of $21.2 million. The Town would be limited to just under half of that, or approximately $10.5 million. When considering this potential funding strategy, it should be noted that other critical municipal projects may be in competition with the fire department for these funds, to meet both today's and tomorrow's demand for varied municipal services.

Strategy: Once an agreement has been reached between the Town and Village that addresses the fire department's space needs:

1. Develop a Needs Assessment to identify fire station components required to be built/improved upon/expanded; consider the impact fee model to help fund a fire department project.
2. Consider local referendums authorizing an increase in property taxes to support the agreed upon initiative.
3. Utilizing the municipal bonding process to secure partial funding.
4. Apply for a federal grant to help fund the building or remodel of a fire station through the ***USDA Community Facilities Program*** and ***Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)*** program.

   Note: While the FEMA ***Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG)*** program does not generally cover new fire station constructions, it can help fund modifications related to health and safety, such as exhaust systems, a building fire suppression sprinkler system, and firefighter safety and personal protective equipment.

PART IX: CONCLUSION

The Somerset Fire Department is a respected, effective and reliable emergency response service. As with all volunteer fire departments, response times will vary depending on availability and number of volunteers that can respond. Increasing the capacity for more firefighters on the roster will help mitigate this limitation. Mitigating strategies such as mutual aid and MABAS help ensure adequate resources are dispatched to the scene. These backup resources, however, should not be taken as a substitute for a department attaining and maintaining their own apparatus and equipment, except when an agreement exists regarding said apparatus and/or equipment.

While Village and Town growth will impact the SFD operationally, the core issue is ensuring that the citizens get the best possible emergency service delivery and consideration of firefighter health and safety. It revolves around a fire department that is adequately equipped, trained, and staffed to respond. Adequate staffing requires a robust recruitment and retention strategy that attracts quality candidates. Attracting quality candidates is more critical than ever, as there has been a visible reduction in people willing to volunteer, and candidates will migrate to the fire departments that demonstrate proactive strategies and that provide excellent equipment and infrastructure for the firefighters to work with and in.

As stated previously, all conversations with both internal and external stakeholders came back to the issue of lack of space available in the current fire station, and the limited ability to position equipment and support facilities in a manner that has firefighter safety and health in mind. It was stated that the station was built and further developed during a time when the Department was running perhaps 100 calls per year and did not have the demands placed upon it that it currently does. It is felt that any success the SFD currently enjoys is due to its membership – a resource that could be threatened with less-than-optimal fire station conditions.

The suggestion that the Town turn over the entire Town Hall building to the fire department is not an ideal solution to the problem and carries with it potential pitfalls. At face value, this would seem to help resolve the SFD's space needs. However, if Lakeview EMS were to station an ambulance in Somerset as proposed, it would immediately eliminate one of the additional bays, along with significant storage space for EMS equipment, and would require a substantial upgrade and potential relocation of the sleeping, living and kitchen facilities in the station.

The current building may or may not be structurally sound, and a significant investment will need to be to convert its entirety for fire department use. At present, if the Town were to continue to rent the building to the fire department it would need to fund the improvements up front, and recoup some of the cost through lease/rent payments. The Town will then need to find funding to build a structure that meets the needs of administration and public works, which, as previously stated, already stores equipment outdoors due to lack of interior space. This cost would be borne entirely by the Town. It may be a better strategy to have Public Works expand into the fire station area, as there would be no need for personnel facilities that the fire station requires.

If the Village were to construct a new fire station, or a public safety building campus, it would be bearing those costs. Either the Village would then charge the Town rent (a reversal of the present situation), or an agreement with the Town would be required to partially compensate the Village for the investment in the fire department portion.

Another, possibly more equitable solution, might be for the Town and Village to enter into a land trust, co-op, or tenancy in common agreement to build a new fire station on its own property. This would require clear legal agreements to define shared responsibilities, usage and how to address if either wishes to sell or leave the arrangement. While more complex, it could provide shared resources and potentially lower costs. Should either party wish to add on to the structure to allow for municipal offices of some type, this may also be possible, based on the definition of the joint property and with responsibility for costs, etc. agreed upon by both parties.

Therefore, it would seem that the only way that the SFD can feasibly plan and execute the actions required to meet its growing responsibilities and demand for services over the upcoming 20+ years, is if the Town and Village can come to an agreement in a timely manner on a sustainable strategy that will allow the SFD to do so. In doing so, the SFD can also continue to be a critical resource that supports the municipalities' own comprehensive plans.

<u>As noted, fire department growth, and improved service delivery to both communities (regarding the strategic goals in this report) will be difficult to achieve until the building/space issue is resolved</u>.

PART X: 2026 – 2046 Strategic Goals

Any progress for the SFD to move forward strategically relies on the Town and Village coming to an agreement as to how important the SFD's future is, and how they choose to help it develop and prepare for coming demands.

Rectifying the fire station situation is a critical capital improvement issue which is presently impacting the fire department in negative ways. That issue needs to be addressed separately and is included as a strategic goal only in so far as providing information and input for the decision-making process. If the governing bodies would like a stakeholder to participate in the process, they may request it.

The strategic goals and key performance indicators are presented to assist the SFD maintain and improve upon its foundation of culture, professionalism and commitment to both communities, and to enhance service delivery and firefighter health and safety.

Key Performance Indicators**:**

Key Performance Indicators (KPI) are the elements of the plan that express what you want to achieve by when. They are quantifiable, outcome-based statements that are used to measure if goal progress is on track to meet its objectives. KPI timelines are broadly adjustable to account for personnel availability and workloads and would not take effect until the specific goal's process is initiated.

The following are the Strategic Goals and KPI's for the 2026 – 2046 timeframe:

Strategic Goal # 1**:** **Prepare Internal Document Listing Alternative Fire Station Strategies with Justifications, including a) the acquisition and remodeling of the current Town Hall and b) construction of a new fire station along with preferred location(s).**

KPI's:

- 30-day:
  - Create a committee tasked with listing alternative fire station strategies based on the information in the Strategic Plan, and/or other current sources of information.
- 60-day:
  - Hold regular meetings over the next 90 days, as needed.
    - Include plan details and estimated cost factors for each alternative
  - Prioritize options.
- 90-day:
  - Research and prepare funding options of top priority alternatives for review by Town and Village Boards. Included, but not limited to, referendum, bonding and SAFER grant and other federal grant opportunities.
  - 120-day: Implement funding strategies, including, but not limited to, drafting grant request(s) and drafting referendum wording.

Strategic Goal # 2: **Hire a full-time Fire Chief or Fire Inspector**

KPI's:

- 30-day:
  - Establish a work group to discuss potential position descriptions and research what current combination fire departments in the State do.
- 90-day:
  - Fire Chief or Inspector position description completed and submitted to the Village and Town Board Presidents and the Fire Board for approval.

Strategic Goal # 3: **Create Junior Officer positions (Lieutenant) and Apparatus Operator for a more structured chain-of-command and promote firefighter mentorship; this is also an incentive for promotions.**

KPI's:

- 45-day: Establish a work group of firefighters and officers to discuss the proposed positions and how they would be incorporated into fire department operations.
  - Include 'acting' position requirements in the event an apparatus operator is unavailable.
- 120-day: Develop/Update position descriptions with purpose statement and expectations; identify training requirements needed to implement positions.
  - Consult with Chippewa Valley Technical College
- 1-year:
  - Training completed
  - Assignment of responsibilities and Officer training.

Strategic Goal #4: **Develop an Outreach Program that addresses current and future department recruiting/onboarding efforts for volunteers as well as community service needs based on increasing candidate/customer diversification and changing population demographics**.

KPI's:

- 90-day:
  - Establish a community outreach/recruiting development team.
  - Form a team to review onboarding and begin to develop a program to reflect annual rotation of team members; address any perceived shortcomings of current program.
- 6-month:
  - Community Outreach goals identified, and strategies identified for development.

- Recruiting strategies researched and brought forward for discussion/ development.
- 9-month:
  - Community Outreach plan developed and approved for implementation.
  - Recruiting initiatives developed and implemented.
  - Social media presence established.
  - Revised onboarding program fully implemented.
- 12 – 18 months:
  - Fully implemented community outreach program.
  - Review of Recruiting Initiative performance for effectiveness.

Strategic Goal #5: **Work with Lakeview EMS to Identify EMS trends and related broad-based deliverables to analyze the community's current and future medical needs.**

KPI's:

- 60-day: Establish an EMS committee to identify and study community-based EMS trends across the county/region/state and country. Include local EMS stakeholders including the medical community and hospital administration.
- 6-month:
  - Identify current EMS trends, both emergent and non-.
  - Meeting with leadership to discuss.
  - Hold shift meetings to discuss; provide feedback to leadership.
- 9-month:
  - Determine if EMR level training is best service EMS needs and trends, or if moving to an EMT fire department is in order.
- 1-year:
  - Have new EMS trends identified, and implementation strategies developed.
- 18-month to 2-years (depending on licensure training needs); full implementation of updated EMS delivery strategies.

Strategic Goal #6: **Conduct a thorough inventory and review of the SFD capital fleet and response equipment to determine appropriateness, practicality to meet response and current firefighting strategies and best practices; incorporate a Quint Pumper into the capital equipment replacement plan**.

KPI's:

- 90-day: Create three teams, one fire based, one EMS based and one specialty equipment to perform the inventories.
- 9-months: Review inventories and, using input from industry experts, determine appropriate type and trim level for capital fleet, type and numbers of fire, EMS and specialty equipment required for response needs.
  - Confirm the adequacy (or needs) of the SFD apparatus fleet.

- 1-year: Review capital improvement plan with recommendations for retaining, modifying or replacing capital fleet and response equipment.

Strategic Goal #7: Facilitate informational meetings for the Town and Village Boards, as well as the Joint Fire Commission and an open public session to explain and answer questions on the operations of the fire service and the SFD in particular; inform them why current conditions create new space needs and why current conditions can be considered an unsafe/unhealthy work environment.

KPI's:

- 30-days: Create an outreach committee for the Strategic Goal.
- 60-days: Draft an informational meeting syllabus to be reviewed by Fire Chief, Assistant Chief and Captain(s)
  - Approach Town & Village Boards to set date for meeting
  - Discuss and determine if, when and where a public session could be held.
- 90-days: Revise draft and prepare multi-media presentation and any equipment needed for demonstration or display
- 120-days: Final presentation ready for delivery.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The successful completion of this strategic plan would not have been possible without the candid and enthusiastic input of many stakeholders. Five Bugle Training & Consulting, LLC would like to thank and acknowledge the following individuals and groups that supported and played a significant role in developing this project:

- Fire Chief Travis Belisle
- Town Board Chairperson Douglas Plourde
- Village President Donnie Kern
- Town Clerk/Treasurer Jeri Koester
- Village Clerk Jessica Lehman
- Jon Muller, EMS Director, Lakeview Hospital
- Town of Somerset Town Board
- Village of Somerset Village Board
- Internal and External Stakeholders

Attachment I: Somerset FD SWOT Analysis Questionnaire

October 13, 2025

TO: Members of the Somerset Fire Department

FR: Bruce Fuerbringer, 5 Bugle Training & Consulting

RE: STRATEGIC PLANNING QUESTIONNAIRE

Greetings! As you may be aware, the Somerset Fire Department is undergoing a strategic planning process to plan for the next 3-5 years and meet any potential challenges as it moves forward. Your input is requested, and a critical component of developing this plan.

To get as much input as possible, and to keep things as convenient as possible, I am taking a dual approach to gathering information. I am happy to meet in-person with any member that would like to discuss things with me personally and as an alternative, I have attached a questionnaire that could be filled out. If you would like to be scheduled for an in-person meeting, please write that on the questionnaire instead of providing answers. I will work with you to find times that work for all interested.

Otherwise, no names are required, and if we meet in person, confidentiality is guaranteed.

I have asked Chief Belisle to provide a secure means for the surveys to be returned. All the input received will be summarized and provided as feedback to department members in the future as part of the planning process.

I am providing my contact information if you would like to reach out to me for any reason. The membership is the backbone of the fire department. Your input will help the SFD continue to move forward and maintain its standard of excellence!

Please return the surveys by **Sunday evening, October 19th**. THANK YOU for your willingness to participate.

Bruce Fuerbringer, M.S., EFO
bfuerbringer@gmail.com
(715) 577-8944 (cell) – call or text
(715) 926-5503 (home landline)

Somerset Fire Dept. (SFD)
Strategic Planning Questionnaire

1. What are the strengths of the SFD; what motivates you to volunteer with this FD?

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. What are the weaknesses of the SFD; what improvements/changes would motivate you even more?

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. What opportunities exist to turn the weaknesses into strengths, or simply benefit the SFD? What other opportunities are there to strengthen the FD within the communities it serves?

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. What are any threats that you perceive to the SFD, that would impact the membership or response capabilities?

_____

_____

_____

_____