



Winchendon Fire Department

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Thomas J. Smith
Fire Chief

Winchendon Fire Department Business Plan Fiscal 2026–2029 Strategic Outlook

Executive Summary

The Winchendon Fire Department (WFD) is committed to protecting life, property, and the environment through responsive emergency services, public education, and community outreach. In the face of economic constraints, WFD will pursue a strategic business model focused on **enhancing ambulance revenue**, **expanding service capacity**, and **investing back into the community**. By increasing operational efficiency and leveraging partnerships, WFD will maintain high standards of service delivery and fiscal responsibility.

Mission Statement

“To provide responsive, professional, and compassionate emergency services while fostering a safe and resilient community through innovation, preparedness, and public engagement.”

Strategic Goals

1. **Enhance and Expand Revenue Streams**
 2. **Increase Operational Efficiency**
 3. **Reinvest in Community Services**
 4. **Foster Strategic Partnerships**
 5. **Support Staff Wellness and Development**
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1. Revenue Generation through Ambulance Services

Current Context

Ambulance transport services represent a significant, sustainable revenue stream. With growing healthcare needs and a regional shortage of certified EMS responders, WFD is fortunate to be well-positioned to not only continue our exceptional patient care but also to expand the revenue generated by such care.



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Strategic Actions:

- **Optimize Billing & Collections**

- Continue partnership with a professional third-party EMS billing agency (Coastal Medical Billing)
- Enhance our modern ePCR systems to provide more accurate, real-time documentation. This enhancement will reduce time on paperwork, allowing for faster turnover of ambulance while getting the accurate information to billing.
- Yearly review of ambulance fees to ensure that we are competitive in the market.
- Continue work with accounting department on the accounts that should be added and removed from collections.
- Train staff on documentation practices that maximize reimbursement

- **Expand ALS/BLS Transport Capabilities**

- Slowly increase staffing to allow dual ambulance coverage at all times, reducing need for mutual aid ambulances. Reducing mutual aid provides better patient care for Winchendon while also increasing ambulance transport revenue.
- Examine and implement (if beneficial) dynamic scheduling to match call volume trends and additional response needs.
- Explore regional service coverage agreements (mutual aid/contracted transport) with neighboring communities that do not have a transporting ambulance.
- Expand upon our response to Clearbrook Treatment Center to include all medical calls. This is only feasible if we are staffed at four responders. The potential for approximately an additional \$150,000 is there to possibly be tapped in the future.
- Explore the area of Community Paramedicine. This upcoming area could not only better care for community members who want to stay in their homes but also provide a revenue stream into the future.

- **Reinvestment Strategy**

- Allocate a percentage of ambulance revenue for:
 - Training and certifications – By allocating funds to train members to the ALS (paramedic) level we would enhance our recruitment and retention of department members. This would be useful for both paramedics and EMT Basics.



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- Equipment modernization – Allocating funds to equipment modernization would allow the department to purchase modern equipment as well as start an apparatus replacement program so that there would be a revenue source for apparatus when it is needed. This would be done by placing a percentage in an account each year for future ambulance purchases.
 - Community health program – By investing in a smaller non-transport vehicle we would be able to further explore the Community Paramedicine program mentioned previously. When not being used for Community Paramedicine this vehicle could be used as an ALS intercept vehicle reducing wear and tear on our ambulances.
- **Community Outreach**
 - Educate residents on when to use EMS. This education would benefit the community in multiple ways. First, residents would be able to recognize signs and symptoms of serious medical conditions. This could avoid a more serious condition down the road. Secondly, if residents had non-emergency questions they might not call an ambulance, allowing a more appropriate response by the department.
 - Offer non-emergent transport / treatment for senior and at-risk populations. By having this as a fee based service it would provide a revenue stream while still remaining under the often very high co-pays charged by hospitals and insurance companies.
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2. Revenue and Service Return to the Community

Philosophy

Revenue earned through ambulance services and other programs will be reinvested to enhance quality of life and emergency response capabilities.

Key Initiatives:

- **Public Education Programs**
 - CPR and Stop the Bleed courses. These courses would be taught by certified instructors throughout the community using a “for cost” model.
 - Fire prevention and safety workshops. Members would schedule various appearances throughout the community to hand out pamphlets and arrange for home safety inspections. These inspections would help the residents to become familiar with our department while identifying dangers in their home.
 - Create a house numbering program. Lack of proper house numbers visible to responders is a enormous problem for our department. This could be offered either as a result of ambulance revenue or as a fee based service.



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- Opioid response awareness, in partnership with local health departments, would be promoted through community Narcan classes. These classes aim to empower individuals with the knowledge and tools to potentially save a loved one's life. Upon completion, participants would receive "leave-behind kits," which would also be stocked on each ambulance for distribution to the families of overdose patients.

- **Grant Development**

- Dedicate time to identifying and applying for state/federal grants for a wide range of both equipment and staffing.
- Any opportunity to use grant funding for capital investments (apparatus, turnout gear, fire station project, etc.) should be explored in an effort to reduce what the community would need to provide.
- Exploration of the government excess property program. Items may not be brand new but many items can save money for the town.

- **Equipment Sharing & Joint Training**

- Collaborate with neighboring fire departments to cross train responders. By working with these departments there is the possibility to recruit members for all departments. This may reduce the staffing shortages and create more part-time employees available for shifts.
- Reduce duplication of specialty equipment by sharing high-cost resources. This is a challenge due to the response times with large apparatus. However, sharing certain non-emergency items could reduce some of our planned expenses.
- Explore with neighboring departments the possibility of a general purchasing agreement. By purchasing some supplies in bulk and then dispersing them accordingly it may save money over the long haul.

- **Community Risk Reduction (CRR) Programs**

- Home safety inspections for seniors in the community. By interacting with this at-risk population our members would bring an increased comfort level to the community while making sure that any unsafe situations are corrected by the proper individuals.
- Continued expansion in the department's residential lock box program which is currently grant funded. These residential boxes allow quicker response in the event of an emergency as well as the comfort that your spare key is not "just thrown under the mat".
- Look into the creation of forming some type of Community CERT team. This team could be used in many ways throughout the community in both emergency and non-emergency situations. There is the possibility of this also being something that is a shared resource between multiple communities.



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- Car seat inspection program is something that could be expanded. Possibly working with the elementary schools and the School Resource Officer we would be able to not only expand the inspections conducted but possibly locate a grant program for those residents who cannot afford a proper car seat.
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3. Operational Efficiencies and Cost Management

Initiatives:

- Explore various scheduling models throughout the fire service. By using call volume data in combination with National Standards our department may be able to find a model where services are not reduced while expenses are.
 - Apparatus lifecycle planning is key to avoiding the need to replace multiple high priced items at the same time, ultimately creating a financial hardship for the community. By taking money out of the ambulance revenue each year and putting it in an apparatus replacement account we would be creating a funding source for these large purchases. Having this funding source would allow for Town Meeting attendees and Capital Planning members to feel more comfortable with purchases that will not be delivered for years.
 - Continue to update an apparatus lifecycle chart that would be available for the financial boards of the community. The costs of these vehicles would vary but the community would have a basic idea of major purchases on the horizon. This chart should include any items that would be over \$20,000 to purchase.
 - Review all ambulance accounts on a regular basis in an effort to increase fees collected.
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4. Workforce Resilience & Development

Focus Areas:

- **Training & Credentialing**
 - Continued availability of classes for our members is key to their ongoing ability to move forward and stay on the cutting edge of the medical and fire fields.
 - Using some ambulance funding to train more qualified paramedics would be paramount in our department's recruitment. Having this type of training would show the department's desire to invest in their members which would ultimately attract applicants even when the wages are mid-range compared to area departments.



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- **Retention and Wellness Programs**

- Continue the availability of peer support teams and EAP services. Encourage members to participate in these programs thus eliminating the stigma that has surrounded such programs in the past.
- Develop a workout program for the firefighters around exercises that are connected to the job duties they perform. This will reduce injuries which will directly affect the overtime needed to fill in for an injured firefighter.

- **Leadership Development**

- Require participation in leadership courses and fire officer development programs that are established in the fire service. Leadership education enrichment is key to the department's success.
 - Create a mentor succession planning program to ensure continuity of leadership. Every leadership position should be grooming the levels below them in rank to eventually take over in the department.
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5. Strategic Partnerships and Advocacy

Partner Engagement:

- **Local Government**

- Regularly engage Select Board and Finance Committee with department reports and updates. Possibly meet with these boards every four to five months to create a feeling of trust from all parties involved.
- Advocate for shared funding on items that are used by multiple departments in town. Having some type of central purchasing for basic items could reduce costs. Involving the school in this could increase our buying power even more as a town.
- Work with local Building Inspector to revitalize the Abandoned / Vacant Building program. Enforcement of this program will improve the safety in the community, allow for neighborhoods to possibly improve their appearance and will create a revenue stream through a system of fines for those individuals not following the policies of the program.

- **Healthcare Providers**

- Collaborate with local hospital for community paramedicine pilot program. This program would improve the services in the community while creating a revenue stream that could be used to offset the program.



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- **Fire Service Organizations**

- Continue working with the Red Cross on their smoke/CO detector program. By providing detectors to those in the community that have none it will reduce the possibility of an incident that could be devastating to the community.
- Continue actively participating in regional fire chiefs' organizations. This participation allows for the constant flow of financial reduction ideas, better recruitment techniques and revenue generating concepts.
- The constant sharing of data and best practices with area departments will collectively strengthen the services being provided to the community. If a program is working elsewhere the possibility that it may work in Winchendon should be explored.
- Continue work with Schwartz-Silver on the on the fire station project. Construction documents have been completed and discussions will be held on the best ways economically to move forward.

Performance Metrics and Accountability

Key Metric	Target by End of FY 2026
Staffing / Members	Increase Full-time Employees by 1 / Call members by 5
Ambulance Revenue Growth	20% increase through expanded services and fees collected
Training Hours per Firefighter	25+ hours annually / 50+ for Department Officers
Community Program Participation	500 residents/year
Department Overtime Hours	Reduce overtime costs by 20%
Grant Funding Secured	\$250,000+ annually

Conclusion

The Winchendon Fire Department's proactive and community-centered approach will ensure sustainability, operational excellence, and service expansion in the years to come. Yearly this plan will be reviewed to allow for any needed changes or necessary additions. Through enhanced ambulance operations, community reinvestment, and strong fiscal stewardship, WFD will emerge stronger from economic adversity—well-prepared to protect and serve its residents with pride.