

Grand Junction Fire Department Clifton Fire Protection District

Cooperative Services Feasibility Assessment Overview



Grand Junction Fire Department/Clifton Fire Protection District Cooperative Services Feasibility Assessment

Executive Summary

Grand Junction Fire Department (GJFD) and Clifton Fire Protection District (CFPD) have worked together for several years to provide emergency services to overlapping geographical areas and provide mutual aid to each other as needed. The idea of creating a more cooperative arrangement has been discussed throughout the years and third-party studies have suggested that this could be an option for the agencies.

In 2019, voters of the City of Grand Junction passed the First Responder Tax to expand public safety services to the community. For the fire department, this expansion includes building, equipping, and staffing three additional fire stations to meet the service demands of the community. As part of this expansion, the fire department contracted with AP Triton, LLC to conduct an organizational analysis of the department's structure and service delivery.

While the GJFD organizational analysis was underway, CFPD experienced vacancies in both their Chief and Deputy Chief Positions. The CFPD Board of Directors approached GJFD, requesting that the two agencies evaluate cooperative services and since AP Triton was already conducting a study for GJFD, a cooperative services feasibility study was added to their scope of services with a shared cost between the agencies.

Exploring Cooperative Service

The AP Triton Cooperative Services Feasibility Study was completed in September 2022 and included generalized comparisons of both organizations which resulted in a cursory review and conclusion regarding the potential for some type of service partnership. This initial study suggested that a cooperative agreement between the agencies may be feasible and recommended an intergovernmental cooperation agreement or a joint operating agreement, both of which would need further exploration.

Upon presentation from AP Triton and discussion with both the Grand Junction City Council and CFPD Board of Directors it was decided that a more detailed study would be needed to fully evaluate the potential. In January 2023, the City began this study and GJFD entered into two temporary agreements with CFPD; one to provide administrative oversight of CFPD with a GJFD Deputy Chief serving as interim CFPD Chief and the second, for GJFD to provide fire prevention services for new construction and operational permits for a six-month period.

GJFD/CFPD Cooperative Feasibility Study #2

This second study is intended to:

1. Offer a more detailed analysis of the logistic and financial implications of entering into cooperative service.
2. Provide City Council and the CFPD Board of Directors information to thoughtfully decide if cooperative service is in the best interest of both organizations and the communities.
3. Based on the decision of policymakers, be prepared to create an implementation timeline for cooperative service.

Subject matter experts at the City evaluated all areas of operation of CFPD with additional assistance from members of CFPD. The following areas were evaluated:

- Administration and Community Outreach
- Fire and Emergency Medical Operations
- Fire Prevention and Investigation
- Fleet and Facilities
- Information Technology
- Training and Standards
- Financial Impact and Sustainability

Recommendation

After evaluation and consideration of the information herein, the recommendation is that CFPD and GJFD not pursue cooperative services. This recommendation is based on the following analysis:

- There are significant gaps in all areas evaluated and considerable time and funding will be needed to close those gaps if the GJFD and CFPD are to operate in a cooperative arrangement.
- The agencies operate under different response models and considerable personal and operating resources will be needed to align the response models to operate as one agency.
- The City of Grand Junction and GJFD are in a high growth period with the First Responder expansion projects. The City must prioritize the deliverables of the First Responder Tax; to efficiently and effectively open the additional fire stations to meet the current service demands.
- The assigned workload across GJFD and the City approaches or exceeds current capacities. Taking on the additional CFPD service area and the additional administrative needs are not feasible currently.
- Based on the financial analysis, the cost for CFPD to match the staffing and service level of the GJFD would create a substantial burden on the CFPD annual budget. The costs include both start up/one-time costs and annual ongoing costs. At the required level of service, CFPD current revenues would not support the increased operational expenses and would exhaust all reserves by 2026. Sustainability would require a near term increase in the property tax mill levy, as well as a continued increase in mill levy to keep pace with increase in annual expenses moving forward.

The additional administrative burden that would be required to enter into a cooperative services arrangement would be too great for the current staffing of GJFD and partner departments within the City. The energy and resources required to make a successful transition would detract from the primary objective to fulfill the promises of the First Responder Tax. These challenges include:

- Coordinating testing, transfer, and skills review for the 18 current CFPD employees and adding nine new employees in an academy to meet staffing recommendations at CFPD, while simultaneously coordinating academies for the current and immediate GJFD staffing needs would be extremely challenging.
- Adequately staffing GJFD Administration to provide administrative and logistical support in all areas, training and continuous improvement of existing programs, and fire prevention services to meet current demands, while simultaneously absorbing a significant additional workload with CFPD.
- The impacts of cooperative service extend beyond GJFD within the City of Grand Junction. Finance, General Services, Human Resources, Information Technology, Legal, Parks, and City Administration would all need to contribute time and resources to make this a successful venture.

Agency Overview

Clifton Fire Protection District

Following approval by the Colorado legislature that allowed the formation of Title 32 Special Districts, the Clifton Fire Protection District (CFPD) was formed in 1943. The district was originally formed as an all-volunteer organization.

CFPD is an all-hazards public safety agency of 20 full-time employees and additional part-time personnel that provide traditional fire protection, wildland firefighting, hazardous materials incident response, technical rescue services, and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) to include patient transport (ambulance service) at both the Basic Life Support (BLS) and Advanced Life Support (ALS) levels.

CFPD deploys its personnel and apparatus from a single fire station located in the unincorporated community of Clifton.

Governance, Lines of Authority, and Organizational Structure

CFPD is governed by an elected five-member Board of Directors who oversee the Fire Chief.

As shown in the following figure, the Fire Chief supervises three shift Captains responsible for full and part-time personnel assigned to one of three operational shifts.

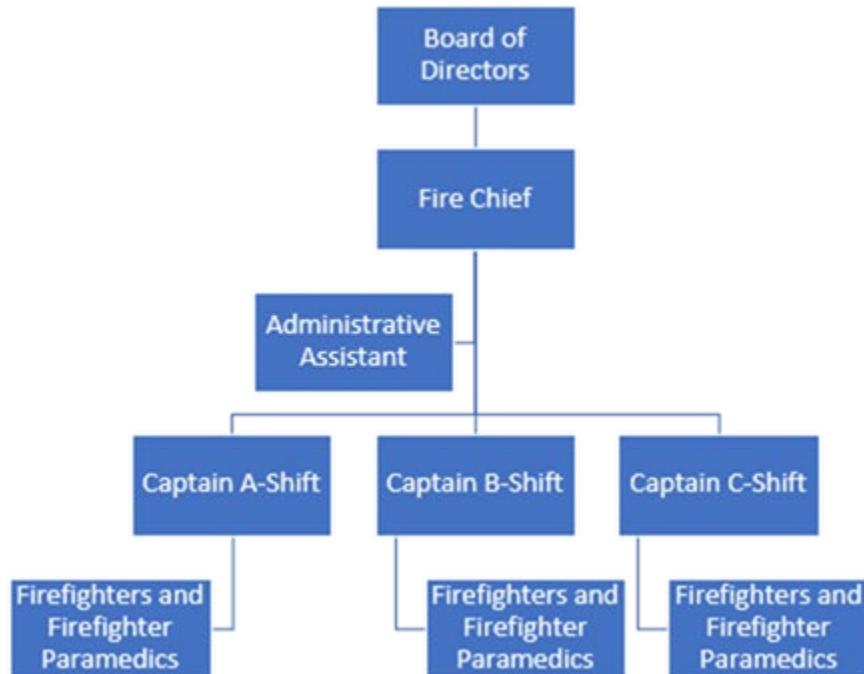


Figure 1 CFPD Organization chart.

Service Area and Population

The CFPD fire and ambulance service area (figure 2) is approximately 15 square miles with an estimated 2022 population of 20,748 persons.

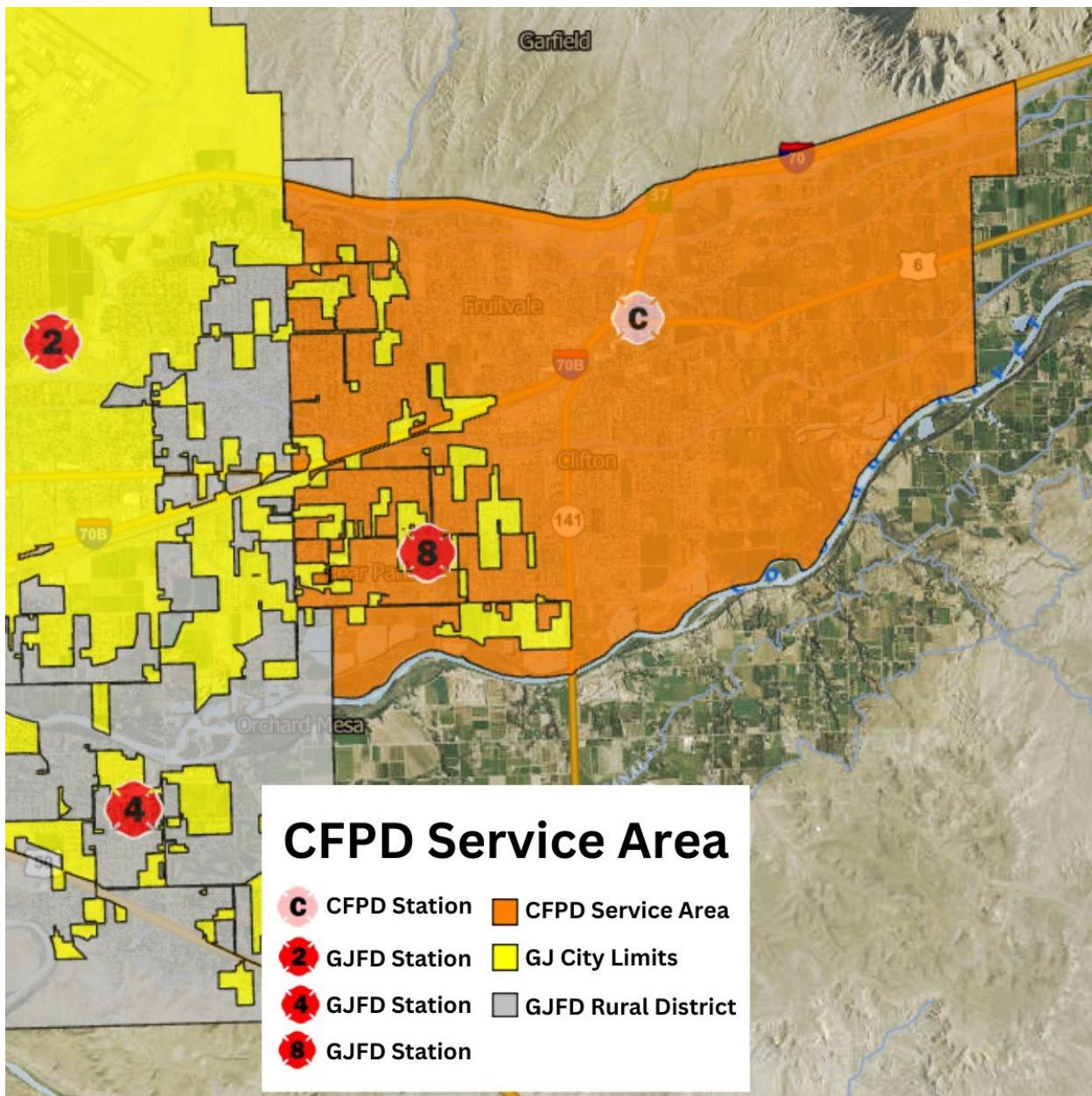


Figure 2 CFPD service area.

Grand Junction Fire Department

The City of Grand Junction was founded in 1883, and the Grand Junction Fire Department was established in 1889 as a volunteer department.

GJFD is an all-hazards department with 181 full-time employees and provides structural fire suppression and wildland firefighting, EMS at the Basic Life Support (BLS) and Advanced Life Support (ALS) levels, and patient transport services. Fire Prevention activities are provided that include fire inspections, code enforcement, plan reviews, fire-cause investigations, and various community outreach activities. GJFD also provides special operations to include hazmat response at the Operations and Technician levels, and technical rescue for swift water, rope, ice, and confined space.

GJFD operates out of seven response stations serving the City of Grand Junction and the Grand Junction Rural Fire Protection District. The Grand Junction Fire Department was accredited in 2022 by the Center for Fire Accreditation International (CFAI).

Governance, Lines of Authority, and Organizational Structure

The City of Grand Junction is governed by an elected seven-member City Council through the Council-Manager form of government. The City Manager is appointed by the Council and manages the City operations including the fire department. The GJFD Fire Chief reports directly to the City Manager as depicted in the department organizational chart below:

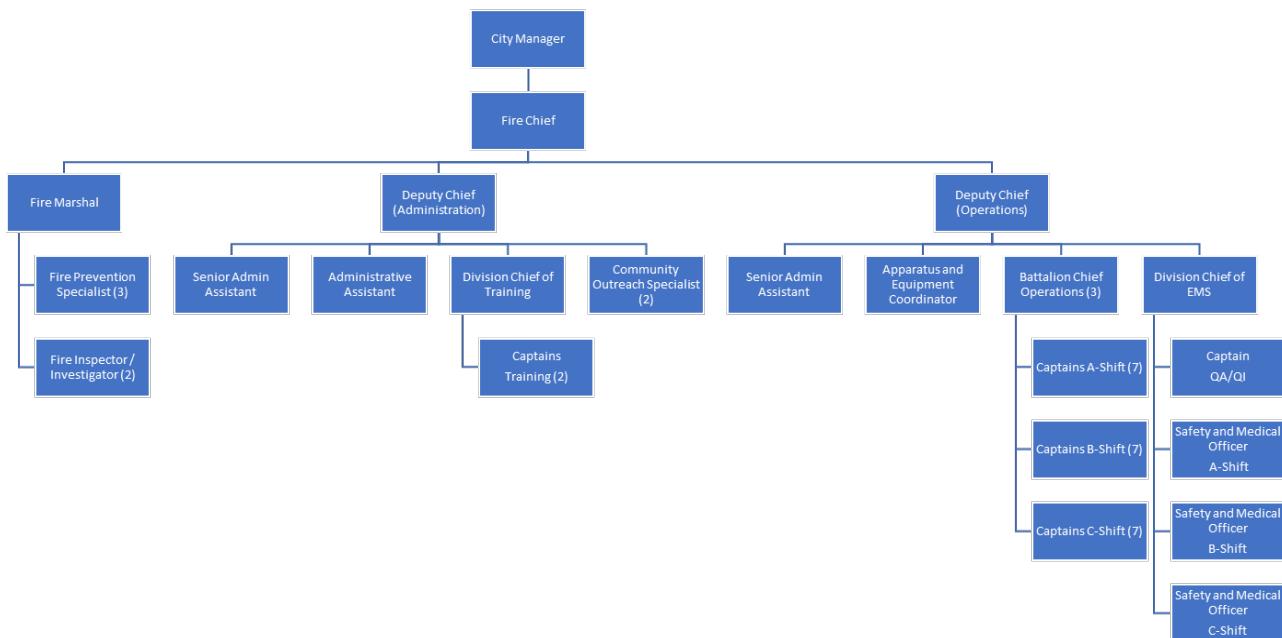


Figure 3 GJFD Organization chart.

Service Area and population

The primary service area of the Grand Junction Fire Department consists of approximately 93.5 square miles, with an additional 649 square miles in the ambulance service area. The population of the service area is estimated to be approximately 93,000 persons.

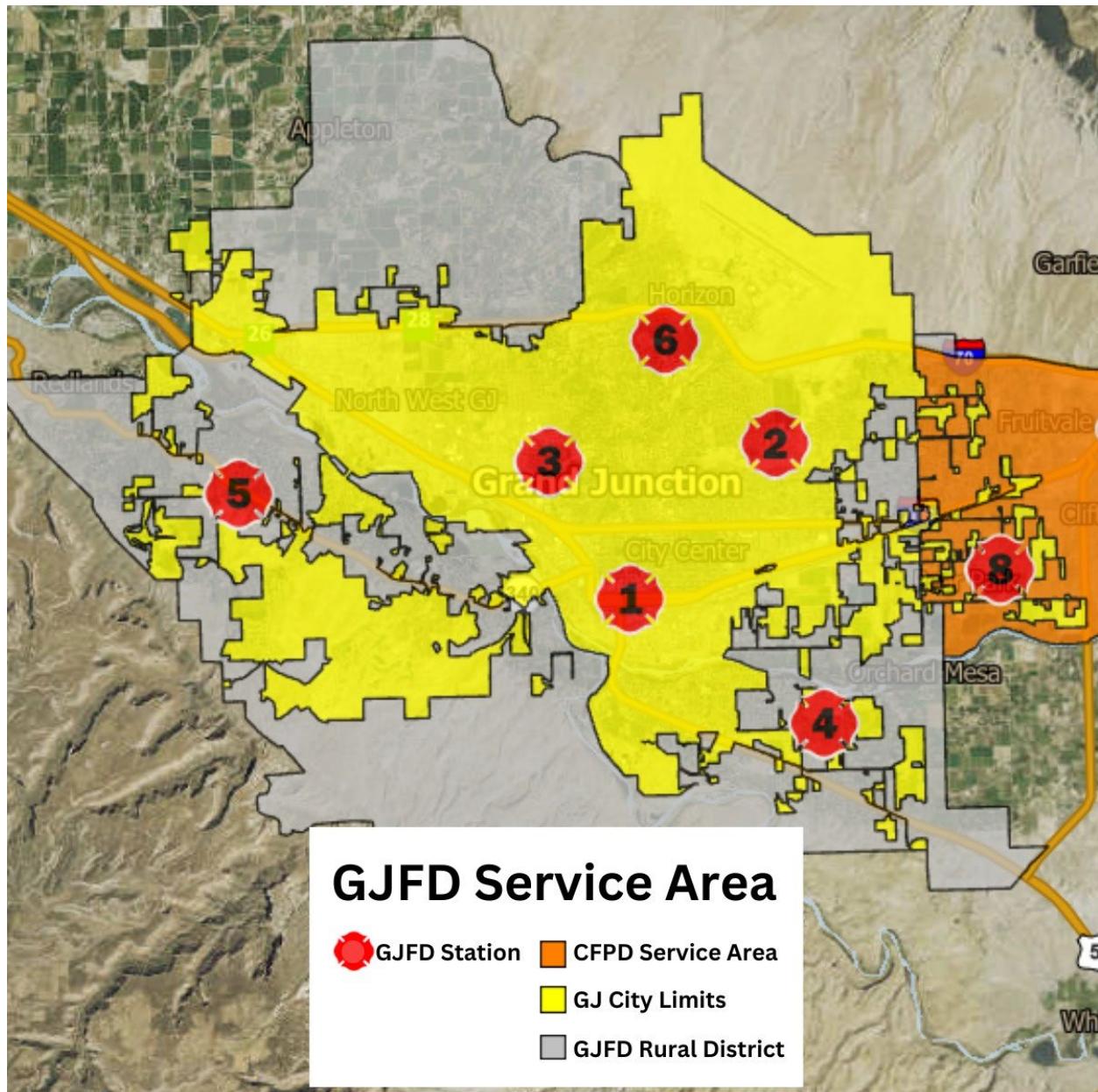


Figure 4 GJFD Service area.

Service and Resource Analysis:

Administration and Community Outreach

Administrative services support the overall leadership, management, and coordination of the organization. Tasks include managing employee files, processing personnel and facility equipment orders, coordinating training certifications, and community outreach events.

Currently, CFPD does not provide Community Outreach Services to the community outside of work that can be accomplished by on-duty crews. The addition of CFPD will bring a need to provide school programs to seven additional schools, multiple community events throughout the year, and coordination of public information and wildfire mitigation programs.



Figure 5 Outreach specialists coordinate a variety of community events, community risk reduction, and public information.

A cooperative service arrangement with CFPD will increase the support needed for operational personnel, facilities, equipment and supplies, and community outreach events. GJFD is at capacity in these areas and the additional CFPD workload would require an additional administrative assistant and additional community outreach specialist positions.

Fire Operations

Fire Operations provides services from station-based personnel whose primary duties include emergency response. This is one of the areas where GJFD and CFPD have a fairly significant difference. GJFD operates under a unit response model where each response unit has dedicated daily staffing and is dispatched based on pre-set response requirements. CFPD operates under a cross-staffing model where personnel select which unit to respond on based staffing and the needs of the incident. These two response models are not compatible and to address this difference CFPD would need to hire additional personnel and increase staffing. To ensure that staffing at the CFPD station is aligned with other GJFD stations, an additional nine personnel will be needed for a total of 27 operational employees at this station to cover the current incident volume.

Besides the additional staffing at the responder level, taking on the additional coverage area and station will require additional fire and EMS supervisory personnel. These personnel additions will require funding to cover the personnel costs for an additional Battalion Chief and an additional Safety and Medical Officer.



Figure 6 Operations includes all station-based employees as well as deployment models for apparatus.

Emergency Medical Services

Emergency medical services (EMS) oversees all ambulance services, EMS administration, training, quality assurance and quality improvement (QA/QI), EMS equipment, medical supplies, logistics, and billing/reimbursement matters related to EMS services.

Both CFPD and GJFD operate as part of the Mesa County EMS System (MCEMS) and are subject to the same equipment requirements. Most equipment and ambulance stock levels will be similar between the organizations.

The current EMS systems for both agencies have a significant call load and have needs for additional personnel. Call volume that would be absorbed through cooperative service with CFPD will result in a need for an additional EMS Training QA/QI Captain to adequately handle EMS training, incident oversight, and quality assurance/quality improvement.

A cooperative service arrangement will also require standardization of patient care equipment and supplies to avoid critical mistakes due to different equipment. The largest cost would be replacement of cardiac monitors, narcotic vaults, and various equipment kits that are carried to the scene.

Fire Prevention

Fire Prevention oversees fire code, life safety inspections, building plan reviews, permitting, and fire investigation. GJFD's Fire Prevention Division is at capacity due to the current workload needed to address the primary service area.

Currently, CFPD fire prevention services are accomplished by on-duty crews or private contracts. Administering general fire inspections of existing buildings would be challenging initially since the Clifton community has not experienced a consistent inspection presence equivalent to the services provided by GJFD. This gap would require a significant amount of upfront community outreach and education to adequately introduce regular fire inspection practices to local businesses and organizations.

Cooperative service with Clifton would require an additional fire inspector/Investigator position to manage the expanded workload associated with the geographic area of Clifton.



Figure 7 GJFD Inspector/Investigators provide a critical service in Fire Prevention, additional staffing is needed.

Fleet and Facilities

All vehicles in the City of Grand Junction are maintained by a central City Shops. Fleet services cares for the regular maintenance needs of all vehicles as well as unplanned repairs. Staff has received specialized training and qualifications to work on fire apparatus. With additional apparatus, accrual and maintenance fees should be accounted for. Funding for $\frac{1}{2}$ of the salary of an additional fleet mechanic position will be needed for the increased workload generated by the additional apparatus. In addition, much of the apparatus at CFPD are approaching the expected life of a vehicle by GJFD standards and will need to be considered for replacement in the next 2-3 years.



Figure 8 Many CFPD vehicles are in good working order and could continue to be used within a cooperative service agreement.

All City of Grand Junction facilities are handled through a centralized service. This includes the regular maintenance needs of buildings as well as providing updates and repairs as needed. CFPD has one building located at 3254 F Road, Clifton, CO 81520. The building serves as a station bay, living quarters, exercise facility, shop space, compressor room, administrative offices, and training room. The original

structure was built sometime in the 1950's and the last major remodel and addition was in 1980. The building is 9,832 square feet and appears to be in good shape both the interior and exterior. The immediate facility needs are capital projects including the evaluation and possible replacement of an electrical panel and updating the exhaust removal system. Annual maintenance and utility fees would also need to be budgeted for.



Figure 9 The CFPD station would need a few updates for uniformity and serviceability under a cooperative service agreement.

Information Technology

Information Technology (IT) is responsible for most non-EMS electronics needed to effectively run a department and a station including radios, tablets, phones, computers, networks, cyber-security, software, and programs used.

To be able to service equipment and bring CFPD up to GJFD technology standards an initial replacement of radios, station alerting, computers (both office and laptops), moving and bolstering the technology environment, and converting applications, programs, and licensing would need to take effect in conjunction with any cooperative service agreement. This would provide the CFPD station and all staff with reliable, safe, efficient, and effective technology with high-quality technical support.

The primary technology room on the second floor is suboptimal and needs to be relocated and bolstered with an equipment rack and a file server workstation. There appears to be existing options in the facility to accommodate this. Relocating the room would provide technology equipment supportability, staff safety, security, compliance, equipment serviceability, and helps prevent equipment warranty issues and potential equipment environmental issues including dust/dirt, heat/cold/moisture.

Training and Standards

The training division is collectively responsible for recruiting, hiring, and training of new and lateral recruits as well as training on-duty crews to maintain qualifications and proficiency in job skills.

CFPD employees have had several questions and concerns related to transferring to GJFD if a cooperative service arrangement was put in place. A cooperative service arrangement would require that CFPD firefighters meet recruitment and training standards that are in place for GJFD. This would require CFPD members to complete a modified hiring process and skills evaluation. Based on results, CFPD personnel would be required to complete either the GJFD lateral or recruit training academy.

The additional academies and personnel needed for cooperative service will require funding for $\frac{1}{2}$ of the salary for an additional Training Captain position to help handle the increased workload generated by the additional personnel and costs to support the initial and ongoing training of the Clifton personnel.



Figure 10 A traditional GJFD academy for new firefighters is 40 hours per week for 20 weeks.

Financial Impact and Sustainability

Finance in collaboration with the City Manager and City Council is responsible for resource management to ensure the delivery of emergency services in the community. GJFD works closely with the City's Finance Department and the City Manager to develop an annual budget and a long-term financial plan to meet those needs.

Finance evaluated several years of financial activity for CFPD to obtain an understanding of the revenue and expense history of the department. Using this history, a future financial projection was developed including the additional costs required to enter into a cooperative services agreement based on the needs analysis described in each of the operational areas above.

The main source of revenue for the CFPD is property tax from an 11.552 mill levy on \$214 million assessed valuation and represents 69% of the district's revenue. The district also receives revenues from ambulance transport, specific ownership tax, and a share of Mesa County Public Safety tax. The main operational cost for the CFPD is labor which represents 59% of the budget.

Increased costs with cooperative agreement; the estimated cost for required start-up/one-time expenses is \$1.4 million; the required increase in ongoing labor costs to assimilate the CFPD station into the City's service delivery system is estimated at \$1.4 million in year one; and the estimate of increase in other ongoing operating costs is \$175,000 in year one. Overall, the increase in ongoing expenses would increase the existing CFPD operational budget by 49%.

Although the CFPD reserves would cover the initial start-up costs, the annual revenues are not sufficient to cover even year one of the needed increase in annual operating costs. This would exhaust the total reserve balance by 2026. Without a near term and continued mill levy increase, the revenues will not sustain the operations of the CFPD fire service under the City's service delivery standards.