



Final Report

July 2026

INTRODUCTION

The Braidwood Fire Protection District has a long history of proudly serving the community. As the district continues to grow and emergency service needs become more complex, BFPD faces important decisions about how to plan for the future of fire, rescue and emergency medical services.

Planning for a Safer Future was created to bring residents, community members and district leaders together in a transparent, community-led process. The goal was to provide accurate information about the fire district's current operations, challenges and future needs, while giving residents meaningful opportunities to ask questions, share priorities and help shape recommendations for the future.

Throughout the process, participants learned about the district's staffing, equipment, facilities, finances, emergency response responsibilities and future challenges. They also discussed the resources needed to continue providing high-quality emergency services as the community grows and changes.

This report summarizes the Planning for a Safer Future process, what participants learned, what the community said and the recommendations developed based on feedback gathered throughout the process.

OVERVIEW

In 2026, community members and Braidwood Fire Protection District leaders began the Planning for a Safer Future community engagement process.

This effort was designed to actively involve residents in developing a long-range plan for fire and emergency medical services in the BFPD community. The process focused on helping the community better understand the challenges facing the district and the choices needed to protect emergency services now and in the future.

The major topics studied during the process included:

- Increasing demand for fire and emergency medical services
- Staffing levels and the need for more full-time firefighter/paramedics
- Recruiting and retaining qualified emergency responders
- Aging equipment and apparatus
- Facility needs, including the ability to support personnel, equipment, training and operations
- Protecting large areas without access to a water supply
- Stable funding for emergency services now and in the future
- Long-term financial sustainability

The Planning for a Safer Future process included community engagement workshops, informational presentations, small-group work activities, group reporting, executive summaries and public documentation of feedback gathered throughout the process.

The recommendations included in this report were developed from the information shared during the process and the feedback gathered from participants.

PURPOSE

The purpose of Planning for a Safer Future was to bring the community and Braidwood Fire Protection District together to develop a shared understanding of the district's current challenges and future needs.

The process was designed to:

- Provide the community with accurate and transparent information about the district's current operations and challenges.
- Build understanding of how growth and regional changes impact fire, rescue and emergency medical services.
- Engage the community in discussions about the level of service expected and the resources required.
- Explore sustainable funding options for the staffing, facilities and equipment required to provide quality emergency services.
- Develop community-informed recommendations for the Braidwood Fire Protection District Board of Trustees.

Planning for a Safer Future was grounded in the idea that residents should have an opportunity to learn about the district's needs and help shape the direction of future planning.

PARTICIPANTS

Participation in Planning for a Safer Future occurred in two primary areas: the Facilitating Team and the community engagement workshops.

Facilitating Team

The Planning for a Safer Future Facilitating Team helped guide the process and served as community leaders throughout the effort. As is important in community engagement programs, community members provided leadership for the process. BFPD staff and leadership served as resources to help provide accurate information and answer questions.

The Facilitating Team helped with process planning, workshop preparation, communications and reviewing feedback gathered throughout the engagement process.

Members of the Facilitating Team included:

Ken Heberer
LuAnn Bolatto
Tammy Favero
Debbie Rozak
Wanda Alderson
Dianne Schaal
Mike Compton
Cheryl Schott
Ashley Gossman
Carl Davies
David Coronelli
Joe Byers
Heather Rozak
Melissa Hughes
Deacon Greg Cummins
Andrew Hughes
Scott Favero
Heather Faletti

Command Staff

Chief Chris Jude
Deputy Chief Mike Pemble
Executive Assistant Kristin Wexell

Community Engagement Workshops

The community engagement workshops were the central part of the Planning for a Safer Future process. Any BFPD resident was invited to participate.

Each workshop included an informational presentation, small-group discussion and a work activity designed to gather feedback from participants. Groups were asked to discuss questions, identify priorities and report out their main ideas.

Workshop topics included:

Date	Topic
February 19, 2026	BFPD Today
March 26, 2026*	A Deep Dive into Fire, Rescue and Other Services
April 29, 2026	Staffing and Finances
May 20, 2026	Options and Recommendations for a Long-Term Plan

More than 25 attendees participated in the first workshop. More than 20 attendees participated in the April workshop, and approximately 20 community members participated in the final workshop.

*Severe weather impacted attendance for the March workshop.

PROCESS

Planning for a Safer Future followed a community engagement model designed to move participants from learning to discussion to recommendations.

Step 1: Establishing the Purpose

The process began with a clear focus on the challenges facing the Braidwood Fire Protection District. These challenges included staffing, equipment, facilities, emergency response needs and long-term funding.

Step 2: Building the Facilitating Team

Community members and BFPD representatives came together to guide the process. The Facilitating Team helped ensure the workshops were organized, transparent and focused on the district's long-term needs.

Step 3: Informing the Community

Each workshop included an informational presentation to provide participants with a shared understanding of the topic. Presentations included data, financial information, staffing information, equipment needs, facility information and options for the future. Communication and outreach efforts included:

- District website updates
- Social media posts
- Email communication
- Workshop reminders
- Printed materials
- Community outreach by Facilitating Team members
- Ongoing publication of workshop materials and summaries

The PFSF process emphasized transparency and continuous communication throughout every stage of the engagement effort. Workshop presentations, summaries, and documentation were consistently shared online to allow community members to stay informed even if they could not attend a workshop in person.

Step 4: Gathering Community Feedback

After each presentation, participants worked in small groups to discuss what they learned and respond to specific questions. The groups were asked to come to consensus or general agreement on their responses when possible.

Step 5: Documenting the Process

Transparency and documentation were important parts of Planning for a Safer Future. Feedback from the workshops was documented through small-group worksheets, verbatim responses, executive summaries and consensus points.

Step 6: Developing Recommendations

The final recommendations were developed based on the information shared throughout the process and the feedback gathered from community participants.

WHAT WE LEARNED

Throughout the Planning for a Safer Future process, participants learned that the Braidwood Fire Protection District is facing several connected challenges. These challenges cannot be viewed separately because staffing, equipment, facilities and finances all affect the district's ability to provide reliable emergency response.

BFPD Serves a Complex and Growing Service Area

Participants learned that BFPD serves a large and varied area that includes residential, commercial, industrial and recreational properties. The district protects portions of Diamond, Godley and Custer Park, along with the Braidwood Nuclear Plant and Cooling Lake, part of the Kankakee River, recreational camping areas, Shadow Lakes, portions of Interstate 55 and commercial freight train lines.

This creates a wide range of emergency response needs, including fire suppression, emergency medical services, water rescue, technical rescue, highway response and other specialized services.

Emergency Services Are More Complex Than Many Residents Realized

Participants learned that the work of a modern fire protection district extends far beyond fighting fires. Emergency medical services, rescue calls, traffic crashes, water rescue, technical rescue, fire prevention, life safety inspections and specialized training are all part of the district's responsibilities.

Participants consistently showed interest in understanding how BFPD prepares for these responsibilities and what resources are needed to meet the community's expectations.

Staffing Is a Critical Need

Staffing was one of the clearest and most consistent themes throughout the process. Participants learned that BFPD currently operates with limited on-duty staffing compared with the number of calls, size of the district and emergency response needs.

During the process, participants discussed how quickly current staffing can be stretched when multiple calls happen at the same time. They also learned that meeting national staffing benchmarks would require additional firefighters.

Participants repeatedly emphasized that people are the foundation of emergency response. As one group noted during the process, updated equipment does not fully solve the district's challenges if there are not enough firefighters and paramedics available to respond.

Recruiting and Retaining Qualified Emergency Responders Is a Growing Challenge

Participants learned that BFPD competes with surrounding fire districts for qualified firefighter/paramedics. Compensation, benefits, training opportunities and long-term career support all affect the district's ability to recruit and retain emergency responders.

Participants connected competitive salaries and benefits to workforce stability and reliable emergency response.

Equipment and Apparatus Need Long-Term Planning

Participants learned that several BFPD vehicles and pieces of apparatus are aging and will need to be replaced in the coming years. The district reviewed equipment replacement cycles and national benchmarks for frontline and reserve apparatus.

Participants also learned that equipment costs have increased significantly. Replacing vehicles, maintaining apparatus, providing protective gear and keeping technology current require ongoing financial planning.

Facility Needs Should Support Operations, Safety and Future Growth

Participants reviewed the district's facilities and discussed how buildings must support emergency response, equipment storage, training, firefighter safety and staffing.

As BFPD continues planning for the future, facilities must be evaluated based on their ability to support reliable emergency services throughout the district. This includes considering improvements to the Custer Park station and other facility needs that support district operations.

Financial Stability Is Essential

Participants learned that BFPD faces financial pressures that make long-term planning more important. Rising costs, limited revenue growth, PTELL restrictions, TIF-related impacts and the need to maintain reserves all affect the district's ability to keep pace with emergency service needs.

Participants also learned that BFPD has not received a voter-approved tax increase in more than 50 years.

Throughout the process, participants emphasized that stable, reliable funding is essential to addressing staffing, equipment, facilities and long-term service needs.

WHAT WE HEARD

Planning for a Safer Future participants consistently expressed respect for the Braidwood Fire Protection District and the people who serve the community.

At the first workshop, participants described BFPD as dedicated, committed, professional and responsive. Looking ahead, participants said they wanted the district to be well-funded, well-equipped, fully staffed, prepared, sustainable and modern.

Across the process, several major themes emerged.

The Community Values BFPD

Participants expressed strong appreciation for firefighters and paramedics who respond to emergencies every day. The community recognizes the importance of the district and wants BFPD to remain strong.

Residents Want BFPD to Plan for the Future

Participants consistently supported long-term planning. They wanted to understand how the district evaluates future needs, including staffing, equipment replacement, facilities, population changes and financial sustainability.

Staffing and Personnel Capacity Are Top Priorities

Across the workshops, staffing rose to the top as a major priority. Participants understood that having enough trained personnel available to respond is essential to service quality and safety.

Equipment Replacement Is Critical

Participants recognized the need to maintain and replace emergency vehicles, apparatus, protective gear and technology. They connected equipment replacement to response capability, firefighter safety and community protection.

Stable Funding Supports Every Other Priority

Participants repeatedly identified stable funding as a foundation for addressing staffing, equipment, facilities and long-term service needs. The community recognized that without reliable funding, it becomes difficult to address other priorities.

The Community Supports Action Over the Status Quo

At the final workshop, participants reviewed options for moving forward. The strongest support was for the option that addressed equipment, staffing and financial stability together. Participants overwhelmingly identified the status quo as the option that should be removed from consideration.

Residents Want Clear Communication

Participants emphasized the importance of explaining the district's needs in simple, clear terms. They wanted residents to understand what additional funding would provide, how it would improve emergency services and why delaying investment could create future challenges.

Participants also encouraged BFPD to communicate the connection between service improvements, ISO ratings and potential homeowners insurance impacts.

Fiscal Responsibility Matters

Participants valued transparency, grant efforts, responsible use of current resources and careful financial stewardship. They wanted the district to continue showing that it is managing resources responsibly while explaining why additional funding may be necessary.

PRODUCT: COMMUNITY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Braidwood Fire Protection District is facing challenges that require long-term planning and community understanding.

Planning for a Safer Future participants studied the district's staffing, equipment, facilities, finances and future emergency response needs. The recommendations that follow reflect the community feedback gathered throughout the process and the charge to develop a long-range plan for fire and emergency medical services in a fiscally responsible manner.



RECOMMENDATION A

Develop a Long-Term Plan to Meet the Future Needs of the Braidwood Fire Protection District

The Braidwood Fire Protection District should approve a long-term plan that addresses the growing service demands, population changes, and emergency response needs facing the Braidwood Fire Protection District. Future planning should ensure the District remains prepared to provide high-quality emergency services while adapting to future growth and community expectations.

This plan should connect staffing, facilities, equipment, operations and finances into one clear path forward. The district should continue reviewing emergency call volume, community growth, development trends, response needs and service expectations to guide future decisions.



RECOMMENDATION B

Develop a Long-Term Facilities Plan

Develop and implement a long-term facilities strategy that addresses aging infrastructure, operational needs, firefighter safety, equipment storage, training requirements, and supporting increased on-duty staffing. Facility investments should be prioritized based on their ability to support reliable emergency response services and the District's long-term needs.

This plan should include continued review of Station 1 and Station 2, including the Custer Park facility, to ensure both stations can support personnel, apparatus, training, equipment storage and emergency response needs. As the district grows, facilities should be evaluated not only for their current condition, but also for how well they support future staffing, operational efficiency and firefighter safety.



RECOMMENDATION C

Maintain and Replace Critical Equipment and Apparatus

BFPD should maintain a proactive replacement schedule that meets national standards for emergency vehicles, firefighting equipment, protective gear, technology, and other critical assets. Future planning should ensure emergency personnel have access to reliable, up-to-date equipment necessary to provide safe and effective service to the community

This includes apparatus, ambulances, rescue equipment, protective gear, communications tools, station alerting systems and technology used in the field. A long-term replacement schedule

should help the district avoid emergency purchases, reduce repair costs and maintain reliable equipment for firefighters, paramedics and the residents they serve.



RECOMMENDATION D

Recruit, Retain and Train Highly Qualified Emergency Responders

BFPD must maintain a workforce that can meet the growing emergency service needs of the district. Future planning should prioritize competitive compensation and benefits, workforce development, succession planning, training opportunities and staffing levels that allow the district to recruit, retain and support highly qualified firefighters and paramedics.

Participants consistently identified staffing as one of the most important foundations of emergency response. BFPD should continue working toward staffing levels that support safe, timely and effective response across the district. The district should also continue investing in training and professional development so firefighters and paramedics are prepared for the increasingly complex nature of emergency services.



RECOMMENDATION E

Ensure Future Growth Contributes to Public Safety Infrastructure

As new businesses, industrial developments and residential subdivisions are considered within the district, planning efforts should include discussions about the impact on emergency services and the resources necessary to support that growth.

Future development can increase calls for service, response needs, equipment demands and staffing requirements. BFPD should remain actively involved in conversations about growth and development so emergency service impacts are considered early in the planning process. The district should continue communicating with local elected officials, developers and community partners to ensure public safety needs are part of future growth discussions.



RECOMMENDATION F

Continue Community Engagement and Communication

The District should continue providing clear information regarding facility needs, financial planning, service demands, and future initiatives while creating opportunities for ongoing community engagement and involvement.

Participants repeatedly emphasized the importance of transparency and public education. Residents want to understand the district's needs, how decisions are made and how future investments would improve emergency services. BFPD should continue using clear, accessible communication through multiple channels, including public meetings, the district website, social media, local media, newsletters and direct outreach when appropriate. The district should also continue documenting feedback and sharing information with the community as future planning moves forward.



RECOMMENDATION G

Plan for Long-Term Financial Sustainability

BFPD should remain focused on a long-term financial strategy that ensures it can continue providing high-quality emergency services while remaining financially stable. Future planning should ensure the District remains prepared to meet challenges in a fiscally responsible manner.

Financial sustainability should not be viewed as separate from emergency service planning. It is the foundation that allows BFPD to maintain staffing, replace equipment, update facilities, support training and respond to changing community needs. The district should continue to balance fiscal responsibility with the need to provide the level of emergency services expected by the community.



RECOMMENDATION H

Ask the Community to Consider a 32¢ Tax Increase

Based on feedback gathered throughout the Planning for a Safer Future process, ask residents to consider a 32¢ operating tax increase to address the long-term facility, equipment, staffing, and operational needs of the Braidwood Fire Protection District. Any future referendum should clearly communicate the needs being addressed, the benefits to public safety, and the long-term value to the community.

The final workshop showed strong support for addressing the district's major challenges together rather than maintaining the status quo or addressing only part of the need.

Any future referendum should clearly communicate:

- The needs being addressed
- The benefits to public safety
- The cost to residents
- The long-term value to the community
- How funds would support staffing, equipment, facilities and financial stability
- The consequences of delaying investments

NEXT STEPS

The Planning for a Safer Future final report will be presented to the Braidwood Fire Protection District Board of Trustees.

Following the presentation of this report, the Board of Trustees will be responsible for reviewing the recommendations and determining the next steps for the district. This report does not make final decisions for the Board. Instead, it provides a community-informed record of what participants learned, what they discussed and what priorities emerged from the process.

Potential next steps may include:

- Reviewing and refining a long-term plan for staffing, equipment, facilities and financial sustainability
- Determining whether to place a referendum question before voters
- Developing a public information plan to explain the district's needs and options
- Continuing to communicate with residents about service demands and future planning
- Evaluating facility improvements and equipment replacement timelines
- Continuing discussions with local elected officials, developers and community partners about growth and public safety needs

The community made clear that residents value the Braidwood Fire Protection District and want it to remain prepared, sustainable and responsive. Planning for a Safer Future provided an important starting point for that work.

As BFPD moves forward, continued communication, transparency and long-range planning will be essential.

Appendix

The appendix includes supporting documents from the Planning for a Safer Future process, including:

- Executive summaries from workshops
- Verbatim responses from small-group work activities