CONTENTS

Consultant Findings
Strategic Plan
Recommendations/Action Plan
Appendix of Data Available
06 Consultant Findings

09 Strategic Plan
From the Consultants

It was a pleasure to work with the dedicated professionals in the city management office and the fire department. Charged with creating a strategic plan to address the increased call volumes and workload, possible operational changes and staffing recommendations — in addition to community education and outreach — we were eager to provide some answers to the council. Joining me in this endeavor is former Thousand Oaks Mayor Andy Fox. As most of you know Andy retired after 24 years on the Council. His experience as an elected official combined with his professional career as a 38-year member of the Los Angeles Fire Department holding positions of both Union President and Fire Deputy Chief has provided a unique insight and expertise to this report. As a communications professional familiar with the city, I look forward to working with you again. Our findings were unexpected and took a divergent course.

Sincerely,

Dianne McKay
President, Mustang Marketing

Andrew P. Fox
APFox, Inc. (Retired Deputy Fire Chief and City of Thousand Oaks Council Member)
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Message from the Chief

Each day of my career, my professional goal has been the same: be a public servant with character, integrity and accountability. As the leader of one of the primary public safety departments of our city, my priority is the current daily activities, long-term future, and optimal operation and outcomes of the fire department.

Sincerely,

David Endaya
Fire Chief
Current Findings

The primary scope of work given to us, the consultants, was to create a plan and “take the temperature” of the community regarding the fire department. In embarking on this work, we first interviewed city management and received and read reports prepared about the department, both internally and from ESCI. We interviewed city council members, fire department leadership and union leadership. We also toured each station on multiple visits to enable open conversation with most of the department. Consultant Andrew Fox (Andy) was a career firefighter and held essentially every position in the Los Angeles City Fire Department, reaching number two in command. He also served more than two decades as a city council member of Thousand Oaks. Relying on his expertise as a firefighter and my own as a communications professional who knows this city, we found the situation in far worse condition than expected.

Recognizing this before hiring us, city manager, Alex McIntyre, imbedded Barry Fisher in the fire department leadership. He provided a secondary point of contact for the consultants, with Chief David Endaya being the primary contact, and he assisted in finding answers to vexing questions like:

Why is the historic call volume at levels not seen in like cities?

Were there operational inefficiencies that could be identified?

In addition to answering these questions, we were charged with hosting many personal community meetings to get a real feel for how the city’s residents feel about the fire department.
While we expected to find some issues previously identified in past reports to the council both by consultants and the fire department, we candidly were taken aback at the living conditions and facilities the firefighters live in 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The age and condition of the apparatus fleet was also observed to be well beyond the NFPA 1901 recommendation for heavy apparatus replacement at 15 years. It should be noted that in some cases facilities and apparatus did not meet OSHA or NFPA standards. Note: the OSHA problems have been addressed where possible with using $3.5 million in ARPA funds.

With the stations in various stages of disrepair and the poor living standards, it was no surprise that the department staff we asked to speak candidly with us are demoralized and have lost confidence in city leadership’s commitment to addressing long-standing and well-documented underfunding of the department. Operationally, due to the multiple daily “collisions” and insufficient resources and training facilities, the department rank and file and command staff believe the department’s mission critical obligation to provide fire and EMS emergency services is compromised on a daily basis.

Should council decide to seek public input on how to address these issues from a financial perspective, they should be presented to the public with a plan to address them. The unexpected Omicron surge prevented in-person meetings, and given the importance of this issue and need for public understanding and support, it was decided that the meetings should be rescheduled to a time when a more definitive plan can be presented to the public. We considered an informal internet poll, but did not feel it had the value of “reading a room” in-person and being able to judge how far to push a conversation. Most importantly though, when we met with each of you again, we did not feel comfortable with the current state to have these meetings without circling back to council.

An intentional communications plan is recommended as part of this Plan. It will help the community understand that the city is taking action already and will continue to move the city toward providing the department expected by the residents of the city. Funding from a variety of sources, in addition to time, is needed. The current situation was decades in the making, and it will take time to correct. However, the rate of deterioration is increasing, so our strong recommendation is that council act now. A mid-year budget adjustment was proposed and is substantiated with this plan. The need seems evident. Chief Endaya has also laid out the actions and investments needed for the next decade, and likely longer, to bring the department up to a 21st century fire department. Finally, there are possible funding sources for these actions that must consistently be explored, applied for and prudently used.
1. Keep the citizens and property in our city safe
2. Respond to all emergencies with improved response times
3. Maintain highly trained and diverse staff at all levels
Strategic Plan Goals

4. Fund modern and well-maintained stations and appropriate apparatus throughout the city

5. Educate and enhance the department’s relationship with the community
Maintain highly trained and diverse staff at all levels

Fund well-maintained stations and appropriate apparatus throughout the city

Respond to all emergencies with improved response times

Keep the citizens and property of our city safe

Empower personnel with training

Educate citizens about how they can help

Increase headcount to operationalize efficiently

Review mutual aid policy

Provide peer support and wellness programs for fire personnel

Develop recruitment plan to meet diversity, equity and inclusion expectations

Utilize technology to introduce communication upgrades and web-based training opportunities

Build professional, high-caliber training for new firefighter recruits

Maintain a healthy, dedicated professional staff to support operational business needs

Study optimal placement of stations

Maintain stations to OSHA, NFPA and industry standards

Use current technology for inspection services

Improve fiscal health of the organization to support needs

Educate and enhance the department’s relationship with the community

Bring back Fire Safety and Risk Reduction fairs

Create consistent branding and community outreach

Utilize city media services to promote public awareness

Evaluate community expectations

Utilize emergency vehicle preemption systems

Increase headcount for efficiently

Reduce incident “collisions”

Fund dedicated IT infrastructure and staff

Maintain strong relations with regional partners
Keep the citizens and property of our city safe

- Empower personnel with training
- Educate citizens about how they can help
- Increase headcount to operationalize efficiently
- Review mutual aid policy

Respond to all emergencies with improved response times

- Utilize emergency vehicle preemption systems
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Maintain highly trained and diverse staff at all levels

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Fund well-maintained stations and appropriate apparatus throughout the city

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Educate and enhance the department’s relationship with the community

- Bring back Fire Safety and Risk Reduction fairs
- Create consistent branding and community outreach
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Keep the citizens and property of our city safe

✔ Empower personnel with training
✔ Educate citizens about how they can help
✔ Increase headcount to operationalize efficiently
✔ Review mutual aid policy

The Ventura City Fire Department has been protecting and serving the community of Ventura for well over a century. It almost goes without stating that keeping the citizens and their property safe is the primary objective. However, this requires that the personnel of the department are empowered and consistently trained, both physically and mentally, to do their jobs without physical hesitation or question of procedure.

It is also important to educate the citizens about how they can help by doing what is possible in advance with house-hardening and defensible space landscaping, as well as knowing when to evacuate and take themselves out of harm’s way. This means increasing public understanding of the life-threatening dangers of a new kind of wildfire as experienced with the Thomas Fire in 2017. Though the city has begun charging for inspection services, it is a nominal fee and an opportunity to interact with the public.

Having enough personnel to cover the higher call volume, an aging population and known future growth of the city, some demanded by state regulation, has been a consistent issue. Adding headcount through intentional planning annually will enhance the safety of the department and the community. This has been an unrealized objective of each plan for two decades.

The safety of our city, surrounding cities and the region is dependent on mutual aid. When our engines and other apparatus are all busy, we rely on aid from the County of Ventura and the City of Oxnard primarily. By having a mutual aid policy, the department benefits from this yet also manages how many resources can be safely sent out of the city before risking the community. This is reviewed regularly based upon actual data.
Respond to all emergencies with improved response times

✔ Utilize emergency vehicle preemption systems
✔ Increase headcount for efficiently
✔ Reduce incident “collisions”
✔ Fund dedicated IT infrastructure and staff
✔ Maintain strong relations with regional partners

The fire department recognizes the importance of initiatives that will upgrade systems and plan for future technology improvements. The ability to acquire, train with and use modern technology, both handheld and in the apparatus, allows the department to arrive at the scene of an emergency quickly and efficiently. We will continue to prioritize these efforts.

Having the necessary staff to avoid the perils of working too many shifts without needed backup is an issue that must be addressed through intentional efforts each year, and grants if possible.

Maintaining a reliable radio and communications system that meets or exceeds industry standards will ensure the department has interoperability with local, regional and state agencies during emergencies and disasters. Web-based training will allow for increased community emergency coverage by permitting firefighters to remain at fire stations to complete virtual sessions when possible.

Increased demands for service, operational programs, personnel oversight and succession planning have placed continually increasing demands on fire administration and management. Despite this, over the years, support positions have actually been eliminated rather than bolstered.

Operational and industry efficiencies are often realized through technological opportunities. With a dedicated IT infrastructure and staff, the department will be able to maximize efficiency both in the field and in our administrative offices. From station alerting systems to auto vehicle location and emergency response, technology will provide greater safety operationally and improved personnel oversight in administration. Note: In order to implement county, state and federal mandated training requirements in firefighting and in emergency medical licensure, a learning management software solution is required.
Maintain highly trained and diverse staff at all levels

- Provide peer support and wellness programs for fire personnel
- Develop recruitment plan to meet diversity, equity and inclusion expectations
- Utilize technology to introduce communication upgrades and web-based training opportunities
- Build professional, high-caliber training for new firefighter recruits
- Maintain a healthy, dedicated professional staff to support operational business needs

Use mentoring programs that enable department staff to become top performers and ensure development for succession planning. Maintain performance evaluation procedures that promote individual improvement and organizational feedback.

Encourage underrepresented candidates for the fire service, with special focus on pre-hospital private sector workers. Identify department personnel who can assist in outreach efforts to build awareness of potential career opportunities within the department.

Encourage and promote diversity at all levels by building and sustaining effective mentorship programs within the organization. Ensure all recruitment and promotional evaluators represent a diverse cross section of the community.

Building, in phases if necessary, a modern training facility that provides realistic, hands-on training for fire crews will ensure the best mission preparation while keeping crews here in the city. The current training site is not developed and only has props that have been constructed in-house over the years. There is no adequate classroom space dedicated to fire training in the city.

Healthy and fit firefighters are the most vital resource to ensuring the success of the department. Having adequate fitness equipment in safe areas of the station needs to be addressed at some stations. Creating a comprehensive wellness program promotes wellness/fitness and reduces occupational health risks. This will include reviewing existing rehabilitation policy and incorporating any new health and safety standards.
Fund well-maintained stations and appropriate apparatus throughout the city

✔ Study optimal placement of stations
✔ Maintain stations to OSHA, NFPA and industry standards
✔ Use current technology for inspection services
✔ Improve fiscal health of the organization to support needs

Review and update the fire facilities master plan to address the needs of aging stations and plan for more appropriate placement of future stations. Provide a phased implementation and establish a timetable for full plan accomplishment.

Continue to actively seek out alternative funding sources. Work with city officials and labor groups to develop and implement a revenue enhancement measure for large capital needs that can be presented for voter approval.

Address unique resource needs associated with mutual aid regional response and the drought-created wildfire storms that are becoming more common.
Educate and enhance the department’s relationship with the community

Bring back Fire Safety and Risk Reduction fairs

Create consistent branding and community outreach

Utilize city media services to promote public awareness

Evaluate community expectations

Create and implement a communications plan to educate the community on the needs of the department. This process would include community feedback from a professional political survey, as well as community outreach through small in-person meetings, social media surveys and safety fairs.
Educate and enhance the department’s relationship with the community

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Ventura Fire Dept. Strategic and Action Plan 2022-2027