

January 20, 2026
Lew Edwards Group
Professional Services
Agreement



Survey

- November - December
- 410 Likely Voters in 2026 Election
- Telephone, Email and Text Invitations
- Telephone and Online Interviews
- English and Spanish
- Ad Hoc Sub Committee Involvement
- Full Council Support to Initiate Survey





Significant Issues

Homelessness

Health Care

Gangs and Youth Violence

Drugs and Narcotics

Cost of Living

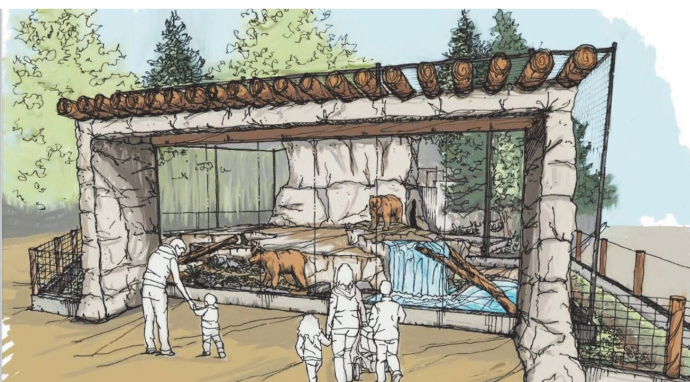
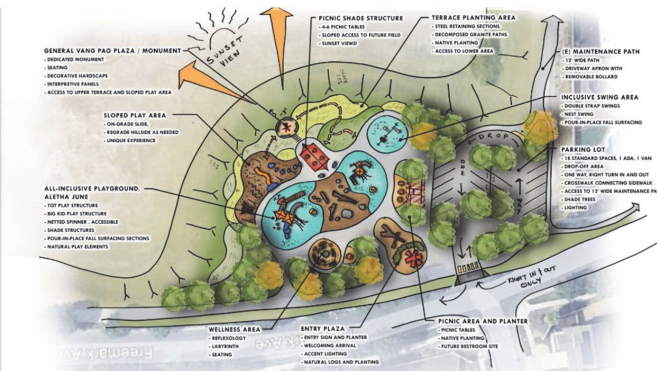
People living in poverty



Public Safety Highlights

Public safety concerns have held constant

- Drugs and narcotics
- Crime in general
- How quickly police and fire respond to 911 calls
- Risk of spreading neighborhood fires



Concerns about Parks' conditions and safety have increased, with concerns about insufficient youth and adult recreation programs



Survey tested three options

- General Sales Tax
- Special Public Safety Tax
- Special Parks Tax



Top Priorities

Addressing homelessness & encampments

Responding quickly to neighborhood fires

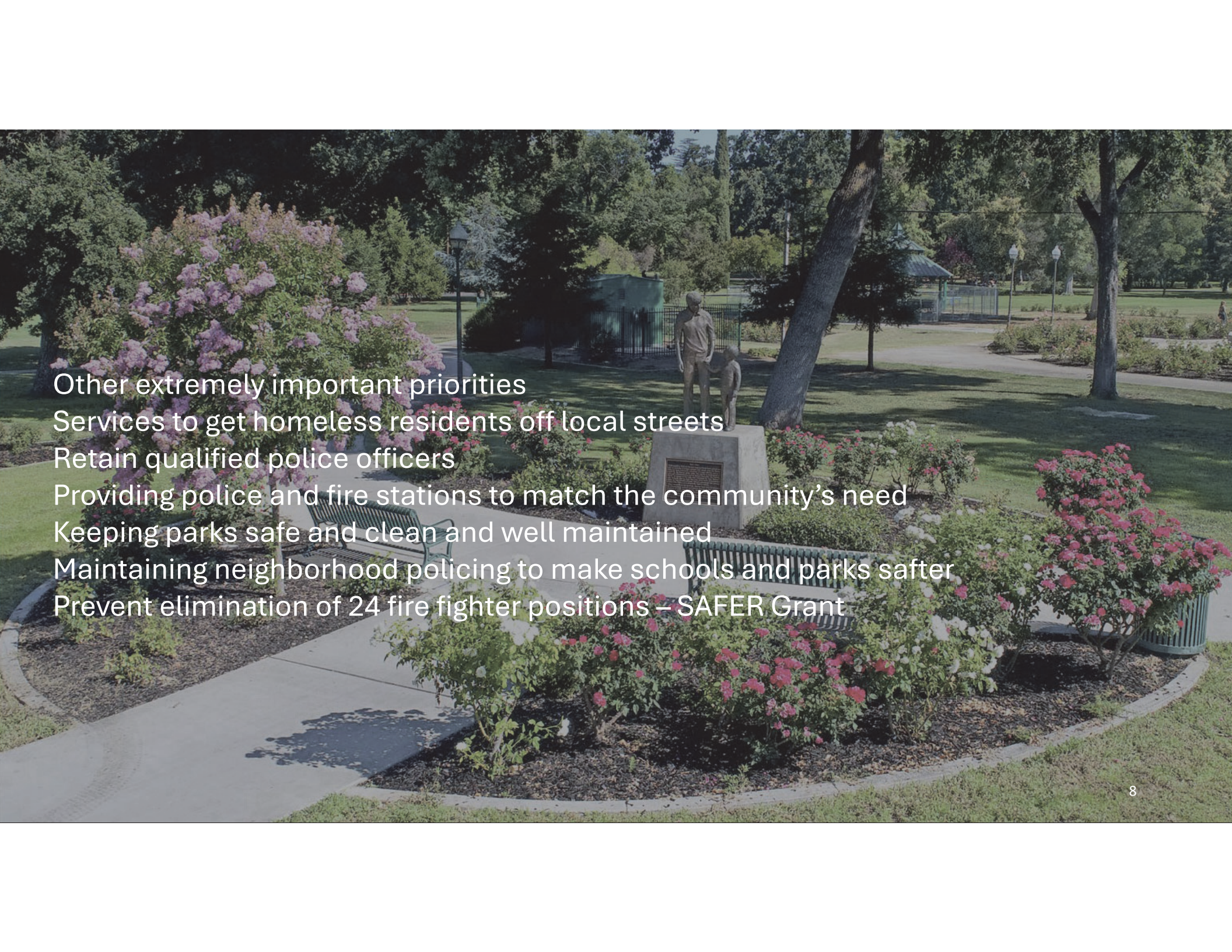
Preventing gang activity

Maintaining the city's ability to respond to natural and medical needs

Protecting and maintaining 911 police response times

Fixing potholes

Maintain Merced's local quality of life

A photograph of a park scene. In the center, a bronze statue of a man and a child stands on a concrete pedestal. The man is standing and looking down at the child, who is crouching. The pedestal has a plaque on its front. To the left of the statue is a large bush of pink flowers. To the right is a bush of red and white flowers. In the background, there are trees, a green building, and a paved path. A green bench is visible in the foreground on the left.

Other extremely important priorities

- Services to get homeless residents off local streets
- Retain qualified police officers
- Providing police and fire stations to match the community's need
- Keeping parks safe and clean and well maintained
- Maintaining neighborhood policing to make schools and parks safer
- Prevent elimination of 24 fire fighter positions – SAFER Grant

Important but less intense
Affordable housing options
Medical staff on every fire engine
Maintaining city parks – clean park bathrooms
Increasing crime prevention efforts
Protecting and maintaining neighborhood police patrols

Compelling rationale for support

- Emergency Response
- SAFER Grant – Fire Fighter Preservation
- Homelessness





Next Steps (Scope of Services)

LEG Role

- Coordinate project strategy and timeline for City staff
- Support public information and community input (infrastructure, safety, general fund)
- Refine clear, neutral messaging using City communication channels
- Advise/train staff on effective project communications
- Recommend informational outreach tools; draft content for City review
- Assist with earned media and misinformation clarification

City Control & Limits

- City Manager & City Attorney approval all content
- Advisory only – no policy authority

(FAQs)



- **Is this a political or campaign consultant?**

No. Services are informational and advisory only, not advocacy or persuasion.

- **Is this related to an election or ballot campaign?**

Only to ensure factual, legally compliant informational materials in coordination with the City Attorney.

- **Who controls the messaging?**

The City. All content is reviewed and approved by City staff and legal counsel.

- **Is public money being used for campaigning?**

No. There is no campaign spending and no independent messaging.

- **Why conduct a community survey?**

To understand resident priorities and awareness, not to influence votes.

- **Can the consultant expand the scope later?**

No. The role is clearly defined and limited to the approved scope.

- **Who pays for mailers, ads, or digital outreach?**

The City, using its own vendors, outside the consultant agreement.

Recommendation

- Approving a supplemental appropriation within the unreserved, unencumbered fund balance in the General Fund in the amount of \$104,375
- Approving an Agreement for Professional Services with The Lew Edwards Group
- Authorizing the Finance Officer to make the necessary budget adjustments
- Authorizing the City Manager or the Deputy City Manager to execute the necessary documents.

