

2023



# Merced Fire Department



## 2023 STRATEGIC PLAN

DEREK PARKER, FIRE CHIEF

### CONTACTS



[www.cityofmerced.org](http://www.cityofmerced.org)



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## From the City Manager

It is an honor to lead the more than 500 employees of the City of Merced. The Merced Fire Department enjoys a rich history within the City, forming 150 years ago to serve this great community. We are eager and excited to provide for the future direction of the Merced Fire Department and look forward to its continued success over the next 150 years.

Sincerely,

**Stephanie Dietz**  
City Manager



# Strategic Planning Committee

On April 14, 1873 community leaders gathered in Merced to discuss fire dangers after a deadly and destructive fire burned through Snelling. 150 years later, nearly to the minute, present day community leaders met April 14, 2023 at Merced City Hall. The goal of the Merced Fire Department was to create a strategic plan to bring Merced forward for the next 150 years. A total of 5 planning meetings were held and the topics were:

- EMS Service Delivery
- Fire Prevention
- Fire Department Deployment
- Budget
- Community Relations

The presentation of the Strategic Planning Committee's work also occurs on a special day in Merced Fire Department history. November 3, 1873 was the first day that the Merced Fire Department's El Capitan Hose Company 1 was placed into service. 150 years later, the findings and recommendations of the Strategic Planning Committee were released on behalf of the group as we look ahead to the next 150 years.

Thank you to all for your participation, insight, and dedication!

Members of the Strategic Planning Committee representing the Fire Department are:



**Derek Parker**, Fire Chief

**Tom England**, Deputy Chief

**Casey Wilson**, Battalion Chief

**Jeremy Franklin**, Battalion Chief

**Shawn Luce**, Battalion Chief

**Mickey Brunelli**, Battalion Chief

**Manual Abeyta**, Fire Marshal

**Dr. Tushar Patel**, Medical Director

**Ryan Paskin**, Captain

**Tony Giotto**, Captain

**Brett Markarian**, Captain

**Matthew Alley**, Engineer

**Dewayne Young**, Captain  
**Joel Verrinder**, Engineer

**Chad Englert**, Captain and  
Association President  
**Janet German**,  
Management Analyst

**Courtney Bohanan**, Lead  
Dispatcher

## Members of the Strategic Planning Committee representing the Community are:

**Mary Camper**, Realtor

**Ernie Ochoa**, Realtor

**Dale Johns**, CEO Mercy  
Merced

**Rigo DeAlba**, Mercy Merced

**Dr. Sima Asadi**, Pediatrician

**Steven Melander**, Educator

**Dr. Doug Williams**, Educator

**Doug Fluetsch**, Insurance

**Annisa Fragoso**, Insurance

**Alison Kostecky**, Insurance

**John Larson**, Business  
Community

**Peg Larson**, Business  
Community

**Rhonda Batson**, NAACP

**Jerome Rasberry**, NAACP

**Virginia Riley**, NAACP

**Hannah Niane**, NAACP

**Wanda Patrick**, NAACP

**Paul Thao**, Lao Family

**Gameelah Mohamad**, Red  
Cross

**Chief Chou Her**, UC Merced  
Police

**George Gongora**, UC  
Merced Police

**Dr. Daniel Okoli**, UC Merced

**Luis Lara**, CHP

**Feliza Gray**, Merced County

**Chief Billy Alcorn**, Fresno  
Fire





## Message from the Fire Chief

Each day of my career, my goal has been the same, be a responsible public servant who abides by moral and professional values doing the right thing for the right reason. As the leader of the Merced Fire Department, my priority is the safety of our members and the public. We will prepare for the present and the future with purposeful planning to ensure superior outcomes.

Sincerely,

**Derek Parker**  
Fire Chief





## Leader's Intent

The primary scope of work requested of the Fire Chief by the City Manager was to create a plan, a living document, for the fire department, city staff, and community to refer to when making decisions regarding to the direction of the fire department. It was determined early on that the message of the community shall be reflected in the decision-making process of the fire department. To ensure equitable representation the make-up of the Strategic Planning Committee the membership would have to reflect local educators, healthcare providers, business leaders, realtors, public safety partners, and community leaders. Two questions needed to be answered:

*Why is Merced experiencing historically high call volume?*

*Are the operational inefficiencies that could be identified both internal and external?*

In addition to answering these questions, the committee was charged with hosting meetings at each of the MFD fire stations to showcase the facilities and equipment and to provide the community with an open house opportunity.

An internal communications plan shall be developed for MFD members to track the progress of the Strategic Plan.





1

Keep the citizens of  
our city safe

2

Enhance community  
safety through  
prevention

3

Provide an effective  
and efficient  
response to all  
emergencies

4

Fund a modern and well-  
maintained Fire  
Department for the city

5

Educated the community  
and enhance the  
relationship with the Fire  
Department







## **Keep the citizens of our city safe**

- ✓ Strengthen emergency medical response and supporting healthcare groups
- ✓ Explore expanded EMS in the community
- ✓ Provide proactive community risk reduction in the form of health education and referral
- ✓ Provide opportunities to serve in non-fire suppression roles

## **Enhance community safety through prevention**

- ✓ Establish a fiscally sustainable Fire Prevention Bureau to support a fire-safe community and smart future development
- ✓ Create an equitable Fire Inspection program for businesses within the City of Merced
- ✓ Create growth within the Fire Prevention Bureau to promote efficiencies in service for the end-user, the citizen

## **Provide an effective and efficient response to all emergencies**

- ✓ Provide funding and resources to ensure that MFD station facilities are adequate in size, response, and distribution

- ✓ Provide funding and resources to ensure the Hawk Regional Training Center can accomplish the MFD mission while supporting Merced College and Merced Unified High School District Career and Technical Education programs
- ✓ Provide funding to improve daily staffing to increase the effective fire force and ensure well-being

## **Fund a modern and well-maintained Fire Department for the city**

- ✓ Ensure adequate funding to support programs for firefighter safety, training, and well-being
- ✓ Recover all Fire Department expenses, where appropriate
- ✓ Reduce apparatus cost by projecting future purchases

## **Educate the community and enhance its relationship with the Fire Department**

- ✓ Increase community resilience for a safer Merced
- ✓ Provide continued Public Education to the community
- ✓ Provide transparent and detailed information to the public at events and through social media



# Keep the citizens of our city safe

- ✓ Strengthen emergency medical response & supporting healthcare groups
- ✓ Explore expanded EMS in the community
- ✓ Provide proactive community risk reduction in the scope of health education and referral
- ✓ Provide opportunities to serve in non-fire suppression roles

The Merced Fire Department has been organized and serving the citizens of Merced for over 150 years. Providing service before self, leading the community in times of need and distress, and forging lasting relationships have been the mission since the creation of the organization. This mission comes at a price to the membership mentally, emotionally, and

physically. As Merced grows over the next 150 years, the need for first response and solidarity will be more evident than ever.

Effective EMS response in the community is essential in today's environment. Providing Advanced Life Support (ALS) capabilities through the fire department engines, trucks and squads close a key link in the AHA's Links of Survival.

Being active and engaged in the well-being of the citizenry with risk reduction, health education, and referral by leveraging partnerships with the healthcare community will only make our community safer and stronger.

The safety of our city, surrounding areas, and the region is dependent on mutual aid. By providing non-fire suppression EMT and Paramedic roles the MFD will be poised to support the region with ALS transport throughout our busy system.



*Figure 1. Teaching Hands-Only CPR*

# Enhance community safety through prevention

- ✓ Establish a fiscally sustainable Fire Prevention Bureau to support a fire-safe community and smart future development
- ✓ Create an equitable Fire Inspection program for businesses within the City of Merced
- ✓ Create growth within the Fire Prevention Bureau to promote efficiencies in service for the end-user, the citizen

MFD has a rich fire prevention history and our community has benefitted from that foundation of safety. The city's growth has come with nuanced construction complexity, population increases, and unique hazards. In order to keep pace with the increased demand, MFD must stand prepared. Increasing staffing within the Fire Prevention Bureau is necessary to ensure the community remain fire safe.

Just as the number of business and buildings within the City of Merced have increased, so have the differences within each of the occupancy types. To maintain equitability the occupancy types must be categorized by square footage.

To keep pace with the previously mentioned increase in demand MFD must

increase staffing within the Fire Prevention Bureau. Increased business inspections in the "B" occupancy are necessary to ensure life safety inspections are conducted citywide. Additional Fire Prevention Officers will need to be added to keep up with the demand of fire prevention.



Figure 2 MFD Fire Prevention efforts in the 1950's

# Provide an effective and efficient response to all emergencies

- ✓ Provide funding and resources to ensure that MFD station facilities are adequate in size, response, and distribution
- ✓ Provide funding and resources to ensure the Hawk Regional Training Center can accomplish the MFD mission while supporting Merced College and Merced Unified High School District Career and Technical Education programs
- ✓ Provide funding to improve daily staffing to increase the effective fire force and ensure well-being

While community members may see and hear MFD responding to requests for service, it is the requests that go unnoticed which require attention. MFD does not respond to lower acuity medical incidents; however, the ambulance contractor may not be able to respond either due to call volume increases. The community needs support and MFD is prepared to support to the community.

Training is needed to prepare our workforce for the service they will provide. MFD is active within the community and establishing partnerships with schools. This engagement allows us to recruit youth for future jobs. MFD has made the commitment to hire and retain local.

The utilization of the SAFER grant to increase the effective fire force to



*Figure 3 E355 and E55 at Station 55*

residential and commercial structure fires is essential in the safety of the MFD response. In addition to the increased safety of a 4-person staffed apparatus, the safety to the community with the addition of paramedic level service is vital.



# Fund a modern and well-maintained Fire Department for the city

- ✓ Ensure adequate funding to support programs for firefighter safety, training, and well-being
- ✓ Recover all Fire Department expenses, where appropriate
- ✓ Reduce apparatus cost by projecting future purchases

Maintaining a well-funded public safety agency can be challenging. The utilization of grant funding to support programs within the community is essential in a disadvantaged community such as Merced. MFD should regularly participate in the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) program as well as the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) program. Additional smaller grants are encouraged to be pursued creating revenues for one-time projects are valuable and fiscally responsible additions to the budget.



Figure 4 State Budget Allocation from Senator Anna Caballero

MFD established

the Master Fee Schedule at the direction of city council. In 2016 the Master Fee Schedule was updated however no adjustment with relation to the economy was added. A Consumer Price Index (CPI), specifically for the San Francisco/Oakland/Hayward area, is the recommended CPI to be utilized for the Merced area. Additionally, revenues should be considered for EMS. Our medically fragile community needs Basic Life Support, Advanced Life Support, and Critical Care transport capability. The establishment of an EMS Fee Schedule is recommended by the SPC for the future fiscal sustainability of the MFD.

Apparatus costs present a challenge for two very specific reasons, high cost and very long lead times for delivery. To combat these challenges the recommendation is to establish an apparatus replacement program and fund the program annually. Also, the utilization of lease-buy back programs with lending partners should be considered to bridge the financial gap.

# Educate the community and enhance its relationship with the Fire Department

- ✓ Increase community resilience for a safer Merced
- ✓ Provide continued Public Education to the community
- ✓ Provide transparent and detailed information to the public at events and through social media

The public is the lifeblood of our “community.” Our “community” is made up of members and contributors who come from a diverse background. While our mission is focused on providing safety and response, it is essential to be inclusive and respectful of the varied backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences which make up our population. MFD has a strong social media presence and that allows our community to stay engaged in our activities.

Our community is very willing to be involved, and the 2023 Winter Storms demonstrated that

MFD could benefit from reactivating Community Emergency Response Team (CERT). Merced CERT shall be reestablished to provide support during incidents and events.



*Figure 5 Firefighter's at a Girl Scout's Tea Luncheon*

MFD shall continue their strong outreach and education, in support of and in cooperation with the Merced Firefighter's Association, to uplift organizations with strong community

ties. MFD has been noted to be one of the most

influential organizations in the area and these efforts should only become stronger.







# Final Findings

The Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) was charged with hosting five planning events to discuss five topics and these would be at each of the five fire stations. The group came together to share both questions and opinions about service, leadership, operations, and provide direction on a regular basis. Early in the first meeting it was abundantly clear that the members were comfortable in asking questions to learn the needs of the community.

The SPC was taken aback at the apparatus and facilities. While many of the stations are in excellent condition, all facilities were in need of enhancements at some level. All apparatus are very well maintained, yet again, in need of enhancements or upgrades at some level. However, the rate of deterioration is increasing as is the cost of supplies and services, so our strong recommendation to council is to act now.

The SPC is clearly aware of the threat to the community with regard to the lack of response within our EMS system. It is clearly the recommendation of the SPC to urge both the City of Merced and its city council to engage in the delivery of Advanced Life Support. EMS is vital to the safety of the community.

Finally, there are possible funding sources for these actions that must be consistently explored, applied for and prudently used. By implementing these recommendations the MFD will be set up for the next 150 years of dedicated service to the citizens of Merced.

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