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SOUTH METRO FIRE DEPARTMENT

Strategic Plan Draft

Submitted to the SMFD Fire Chief and Board of Directors
for Approval

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**Process Facilitated by C. A. Weinstein
Ethical Leaders in Action, Inc.**

Executive Summary

The South Metro Fire Department (SMFD) has engaged in an internal strategic planning process beginning in late 2023. This executive summary is intended as an overview of the resulting strategic plan. It awaits any final changes from the Fire Chief, and then approval (with or without modification) from the Board of Directors.

Mission and Values

The new mission of the SMFD is: *Serve our community with pride and excellence to preserve life and protect property.* The Shared Values are stated as follows:

- **Integrity.** We are truthful, responsible, and accountable to the community and one another for providing selfless service.
- **Compassion.** We care about the people we serve, and we truly want to help them.
- **Excellence.** We work to provide the highest level of service in all that we do.
- **Competence.** We are lifelong learners, always building capability and expertise to prevent harm.
- **Response.** We work to reduce risk, solve problems and leave situations better than we found them.

Our purpose is to positively impact everyone in our community.

Situation Summary

SMFD's key strengths are its people and the service we provide. This begins with qualified and dedicated firefighters and officers of all ranks, and includes a Board of Directors that provides sound governance, unwavering support for departmental leadership, and concern for the well-being of firefighters. Personnel are very well-trained and well-equipped to deliver a full range of emergency response as well as fire prevention and public education.

The most significant limitations of the agency are staffing levels and station facilities. Both of these issues are urgent, and are addressed in the strategic initiatives set forth in the plan. SMFD also seeks to expand community risk reduction efforts, and to drive continuous improvement in operations, including EMS.

Externally, the department benefits from very supportive communities and strong relationships with mutual aid partners, including a shared academy for new firefighters. The greatest external challenges facing the department relate to the availability of qualified and interested candidates for employment.

Strategic Initiatives

The department will pursue five inter-related initiatives aimed at addressing the key factors outlined above. Strategic initiatives to be pursued over the next 3-5 years:

1. Staffing and Leadership Growth
2. Facilities and Infrastructure
3. Employee Recruitment and Retention
4. Operational Improvement
5. Community Risk Reduction

Next Steps

The document will be reviewed by the Fire Chief, and amended, as necessary. It will then be presented to the Board of Directors for input and adoption. It will then be up to the leadership team to inform the rest of the department and to begin implementation.

Introduction

This report establishes and documents the South Metro Fire Department's strategic direction for the next three to five years, based on input from all department employees and directors, in a process facilitated by Ethical Leaders in Action, Inc. It is also informed by a thorough, independent Standard of Cover study conducted by CityGate.

The strategic plan was developed in accordance with the following principles:

1. **The strategic initiatives are based on a thoughtful, internal assessment of the strategic status of the SMFD, as articulated in the plan.** Firefighters and officers at all ranks worked together to develop a clear understanding of SMFD's strengths and limitations, and the external circumstances that will either support or challenge the pursuit of SMFD's mission over time.
2. **Each initiative and all efforts are to be focused on achieving meaningful improvement in one or more of the following respects:**
 - a. **Excellence in Service Delivery.** This includes the SMFD's readiness and capacity, and is intended to include all aspects of service delivery, from risk prevention and public education through emergency medical services and fire/rescue responses.
 - b. **Sound Stewardship of Public Resources.** Investments are to be aligned with real benefits to the community, and made in ways that manage costs and benefits, short and long-term.
 - c. **Fairness.** This includes advancing principles of justice and equity with respect to all stakeholders. Fairness also requires appropriate transparency and accountability in leadership at all levels of the department. The strategic plan recognizes that firefighter safety and wellness are critical aspects of fairness.
3. **The plan advances feasible initiatives with a sharp focus on the next 3- 5 years and a much longer-range view of the department, as well.** We recognize that our departmental priorities must be considered within the broader context of the needs of the communities we serve. This plan contemplates longer-range implications for all initiatives, but projections are limited to a more foreseeable time horizon. Necessary, strategic investments such as facilities replacement and upgrades will have both immediate and long-lasting budgetary and operational implications.
4. **Our strategic priorities reflect the perspectives of departmental leaders at all levels (including union leadership and internal subject matter experts).** The Fire Chief is ultimately accountable for the content of this plan, and for leading in its implementation. At the same time, effective implementation requires cooperation from every member of the department and external stakeholders, as well. Therefore, the plan itself is informed by broad departmental input.

This report consists of the following sections:

1. The above **Executive Summary**, providing a high-level overview of the entire strategic plan.
2. This **Introduction**, including the Table of Contents, below.
3. A statement of the SMFD's newly revised **Mission and Organizational Values**
4. **Strategic Situation Summary** and SLOT Analysis
5. **Strategic Initiatives**
6. **Conclusion**

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South Metro Fire Department Mission and Values

As part of this strategic planning process, departmental officers (captains and chiefs) determined that the departmental mission statement and core values merited an update. The primary goals of this update were to reflect the current thoughts and values of the department today, created by today's leaders. The previous versions, while clear and useful, were created by leaders who are no longer a part of the organization. Officers also determined that a statement of vision was not necessary based on the content of the new mission and values. The vision of the department is to achieve its mission and to exemplify its core values.

South Metro Fire Department Mission

Serve our community with pride and excellence to preserve life and protect property.

Our Shared Values

- **Integrity.** We are truthful, responsible, and accountable to the community and one another for providing selfless service.
- **Compassion.** We care about the people we serve, and we truly want to help them.
- **Excellence.** We work to provide the highest level of service in all that we do.
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Strategic Situation Summary and SLOT Analysis

Overview

The South Metro Fire Department (SMFD) is a joint powers organization serving the cities of South Saint Paul and West Saint Paul, dedicated to community risk reduction and all-hazard response. The department provides pre-hospital emergency medical services and basic life support (BLS) emergency medical transportation. The cities and surrounding areas include a wide range of public and private occupancies, from heavy industry to houses of worship and from educational and health care institutions to storefronts and other small businesses. Housing stock is equally diverse, from large historic homes to modern multi-unit housing. The surrounding area includes the Mississippi river and other lakes and waterways, as well as public parks and other green spaces. SMFD is equipped and prepared to respond to emergencies in each of these settings, under all circumstances. At the time of this report's publication, Fire Department responses are approaching 8,000 calls for service a year, a number which continues to rise.

SMFD provides comprehensive fire prevention and community risk management services, including fire inspections and public education services to its service area. As part of operations, the agency supports a highly skilled water and ice rescue team, and participates in the Dakota County Special Operations Team and Minnesota Task Force 1 to provide:

- Hazardous Materials (HazMat) response
- Urban Search & Rescue, including:
 - High- and low-angle rope rescue
 - Confined space rescue
 - Trench and below-grade collapse rescue
 - Structural collapse rescue
- Tactical Emergency Medical Services

The department is a recognized regional leader in fire suppression and other operations and has earned a reputation for excellence in all manner of emergency response. The department also takes justified pride in the quality and compassion of its EMS services, which comprise approximately 70% of calls for service. The department also benefits from strong relationships with other agencies, including an academy for new firefighters that has been shared with Burnsville and Eagan Fire Departments, and will soon include Lakeville Fire Department. This collaboration not only conserves resources, but also promotes effective collaboration and better coordination between frequent mutual aid partners. The department responds with a fleet of four ambulances, four engines, two aerials, a boat suitable for river operations, and a range of utility vehicles.

While SMFD's fleet and equipment are strong, facilities represent one of the department's key limitations. The department operates out of two stations that are not collectively adequate to optimally support current operations, or to accommodate growth. Indeed, upcoming hiring plans are limited by the space available to accommodate new staff.

Other areas for development growth include continued leadership development at all levels. To ensure that the department will continue to meet its mission while retaining and developing its talented staff, additional leadership capacity is needed, as captains currently struggle to provide front-line leadership along with administrative responsibilities. The portfolios of current chief officers are also too broad, leading to delays and sometimes bottlenecks in the implementation of changes and growth within the department.

Each of the above topics is described in more detail in the following factor analysis ("SLOT").

SLOT Analysis

Input from department members directly informed the following SLOT analysis, which describes the status of the department relative to the above strategic mission and scope. (A more common acronym is SWOT, where “limitations” is replaced by “weaknesses.”)

- **Strengths** – Factors internal to SMFD that contribute to its ability to succeed.
- **Limitations** – Factors internal to SMFD that inhibit, limit, or threaten its ability to succeed.
- **Opportunities** - Factors primarily outside SMFD that promote or contribute to success.
- **Threats** - Factors primarily outside SMFD that tend to inhibit success or pose risks to the department.

In a very meaningful sense, this SLOT analysis represents a consensus of how department leaders and employees see the organization. As such, it is intended to serve as a baseline for discussion of strategic priorities, and to inform operational decisions, as well. Even as these factors change over time, grounding leadership discussions in the mission and circumstances of the SMFD is a useful technique for focusing all participants on a shared perspective of the department.

Strengths

- The department’s capabilities are both broad and deep. SMFD, along with its partner agencies, truly offers a comprehensive all-hazard response. Officers and firefighters are highly committed to full proficiency and sound execution of all technical disciplines. This includes emergency medical services as well as fire suppression and rescue, on land and on the water.
- SMFD’s fire prevention and community risk reduction services are also strong, working in concert with other agencies and outside stakeholders. In addition to inspections of all commercial and multi-family residential occupancies, SMFD programs address:
 - Substance abuse and mental health, in partnership with police departments and their social workers.
 - Fall prevention, in partnership with Dakota County Public Health
 - *Sound the Alarm*, a program in partnership with Red Cross to provide free smoke alarms.
 - Promotion of smoke free multi-unit housing (smoking is a leading and especially deadly cause of house fires).
 - Free bystander CPR training through Heart Restart.
 - Fire Extinguisher training for commercial and multi-unit residential employees.
- SMFD has made extensive investments in training at all levels of the organization over the past several years, supporting all aspects of emergency response readiness, leadership, and firefighter wellness. The department has a strong integration between training and operations: training priorities are set by operational needs, and training is conducted by instructors and formal leaders on shift and in dedicated “in service” settings. As the department structure grows to include battalion chiefs, these leaders will likewise contribute to the capacity to conduct excellent and highly relevant training.

To maintain this key strength, the department must continue to look to the outside for emerging science and

practical developments and continue to thoughtfully integrate that learning into its operations and training. This is a strength of the agency, and must continue to remain one though continued, ongoing learning.

- The department's excellent capabilities are primarily due to the quality of its employees. SMFD's consistently strong teams are the result of multiple factors. Constructive, effective labor-management relationships and processes promote engaged and committed teams. Workforce quality is also bolstered by the department's rolling hiring practices, and by leaders' willingness to uphold professional standards in evaluating new employees and in managing the performance of all employees. While there has been some turnover of employees in the recent past, this has stabilized in the past year.
- SMFD has the best available equipment and an excellent fleet, including personal protective equipment and leading technology for firefighter connectedness on-scene, as well as rescue equipment. SMFD is equipped and trained for interoperability with neighboring departments.

Limitations

- Station facilities are aging and present significant operational and strategic challenges:
 - Interior spaces are not conducive to healthy and efficient on-shift working conditions and cannot accommodate an optimal number of new hires.
 - Some station locations are no longer all optimal for expedient response, given how the cities have developed since the stations were built.
 - Despite recent remodeling, station conditions do not represent an asset in recruiting firefighters who have many options in the current job market.
- The absence of internal support resources (e.g., IT, Human Resources, or finance) makes it difficult for the department to execute some administrative tasks, and consumes the time of senior chiefs, who could otherwise be providing leadership, direction, and direct support for the department's strategic objectives.
- Funding is a perennial challenge, given the breadth of services and the necessity to maintain high quality standards. The communities of West Saint Paul and South Saint Paul are well-served by a shared department that provides BLS EMS transportation and works with ALS transport providers as colleagues. However, operating at these standards also requires considerable resources.
- Leadership capacity must be increased, to ensure continued operational excellence and to strengthen an organizational culture that supports firefighter engagement.
 - Chief officers and staff captains are task-saturated with projects. The same is true for a segment of the department that bears more than their proportional share of the project work. Due to this saturation, execution is sometimes flawed – "Things can fall through the cracks."
 - The capacity of senior leaders is especially limited during times of transition or growth, which limits chiefs' presence at stations. The department has been filling open positions and expects to be adding staff, consistent with the strategic initiatives outlined below. Currently, some crews at Station Two report feeling

like they don't see chief officers very often, creating a sense of an "in crowd" and "out crowd" in the minds of some personnel.

- The tenure of senior leaders creates a need for succession planning and accelerated officer development.

Opportunities

- The Joint Powers Board, representing the interests of the member cities, continues to demonstrate very high levels of support for the efforts of the South Metro Fire Department. Board members recognize that the budgetary requirements of the department represent a considerable commitment of taxpayer dollars, and understand the benefits earned by those dollars.
- SMFD relies on strong relationships with other agencies. These include mutual and auto-aid organizations, especially those participating in the joint training academy, as well as ALS medical transport providers. These strong relationships promote excellent and efficient service delivery.
- The fire service and surrounding industries continue to research practices and develop technologies related to firefighter wellness and operational effectiveness in fire suppression, rescue, and pre-hospital emergency medical services. These potential innovations often represent opportunities for SMFD's continuous improvement.

Threats

- As a joint powers organization, SMFD depends on support from policymakers representing two cities for its operations and for its long-range sustainability. While this has not been a problem in the past, a volatile political climate nationally and even locally represents an ongoing risk for department support. It is important to note that long-range projects within the fire department require longer-range commitments from two cities.
- Both cities' needs for infrastructure investments compete with the fire department for funding.
- The pool of qualified job applicants remains insufficient to meet the needs of agencies seeking to hire them, both locally and nationwide.
- The fire service nationwide has experienced a cultural shift as the workforce is less willing to work extra shifts, take on extra duties, or otherwise compromise personal and family time for work responsibilities beyond the standard scope of their positions. This is a risk factor to which SMFD leaders must remain sensitive.
- Demand for emergency response services could exceed capacity. SMFD's communities continue to grow, especially with respect to higher-density occupancies. Multi-unit housing and assisted living facilities not only increase call volume, but also increase the complexity of access and transport. Therefore, the growing population will generate more calls for service, and those calls may take longer, on average, than is the case today.
- OSHA is currently considering an overhaul of 29 CFR 1910.156, which would establish new requirements for fire brigades based on relevant NFPA standards. While NFPA standards represent guidelines or best practices, OSHA regulations have the force of law. The nature and impact of these new legal requirements is uncertain at this time, and OSHA continues to extend the comment periods and revision timelines for these actions. It is likely, however, that compliance with these new requirements will require additional funding and may result in changes to how SMFD and its mutual aid partners engage in fire suppression operations.

- Sometimes maintaining strengths entails certain threats. As noted in the strengths above, SMFD currently shares a training academy with other agencies. That program has been and continues to be successful. Its continued success is dependent on participation and investment by all partners in the academy. This represents a threat to the extent that SMFD cannot control the actions of its partner agencies.

The strategic initiatives framed in the following section are intended to guide the actions that will help SMFD pursue the mission defined above, in light of these strategic factors.

Strategic Initiatives

The South Metro Fire Department is committed to excellent service in all respects. Delivering on this commitment requires ongoing investment; it pays off directly in terms of lives and property saved, risks averted, and problems addressed. Indirect benefits include enhanced community vitality through public safety and sound risk management. This strategic plan is comprised of the following initiatives, undertaken in light of the above strategic self-assessment. Our highest strategic aim is to ensure that the department remains capable and ready to meet the community's needs in the future.

The work of implementing the strategic plan over time is organized in terms of the strategic initiatives defined below:

1. Staffing and Leadership Growth
2. Facilities and Infrastructure
3. Employee Recruitment and Retention
4. Operational Improvement
5. Community Risk Reduction

Each of these are described in terms of (1) overall objective, (2) high-level tasks (3) timeline, and (4) performance indicators. Some initiatives also include additional implementation guidance.

These initiatives are framed to be flexible; most include key decisions that will affect how the initiatives are to be pursued. This open-ended approach is intentional; the department recognizes a high level of dependency on outside factors for the achievement of many objectives. Perhaps the most significant limiting factor will be funding, especially for larger capital projects and for staffing increases. SMFD regularly pursues grants to fund multiple initiatives, which are rarely guaranteed. We also recognize that budgetary support from member cities is limited, and we are committed to sound stewardship of public funds. Beyond funding, initiatives are also dependent on cooperation from other stakeholders. For these reasons, flexibility is a built-in feature of this strategic plan.

Initiative 1: Staffing and Leadership Growth

Over the past several years, SMFD has made a number of investments in leadership development to ensure that company and chief officers are equipped and aligned to work together as a cohesive leadership team. This initiative builds on that momentum, particularly as the staffing model undergoes a significant change: the integration of a battalion chief over each shift. The creation, promotion into, and operationalization of that position and the changes that it implies for both senior chiefs and captains, will be a significant focus of this initiative, along with continuation of efforts to increase leadership capacity and skills, to ensure that emerging leaders are preparing for promotion at all levels of the agency.

Overall Objectives:

Build leadership capacity to support operations and strategic development of the SMFD, consistent with our shared values. Develop future leaders at all levels and maintain a high-performance culture of professionalism. Establish and uphold performance standards for all roles in the department.

Expand staffing to meet service demands without undue stress on the workforce.

Major Tasks:

- Create and fill three battalion chief positions.
- Reallocate leadership responsibilities, operational roles, and administrative duties.
- Hire firefighters to backfill leadership promotions and to add two firefighters per shift.
- Invest in professional development for leadership succession.

Timeline:

- Captain selection process complete; candidates are identified.
- Firefighter hiring is ongoing. Five new candidates starting in Fall 2024.
- Engineer training and selection process complete Fall, 2024.
- SAFER Grant will support the hiring of eight firefighters in 2025.
- Update and document leadership and operational responsibilities of officers to include battalion chiefs.
- Evaluate and update selection criteria for engineers and captains by Spring, 2025.
- Battalion chiefs assume positions in July 2025.
- Identify and implement expanded opportunities for officer leadership development through 2025.

Performance Indicators:

- Successful hiring, training, and integration of new firefighters into operations.
- Promotion of battalion chiefs and promotion of captains.
- Operational roles fully documented.
- Reduced use of forced and voluntary overtime in operations when fully staffed.
- Maintenance of performance standards consistent with Standards of Cover, even as call volume continues to increase.

Initiative 2: Facilities and Infrastructure

Along with staffing levels, station facilities have been identified as a key limitation of SMFD. While long-term solutions will require significant community investments, the department must find cost-effective and feasible ways to meet short-term, increasingly urgent needs for space to accommodate new officers and larger crews.

Overall Objectives:

Upgrade facilities to support full complement of staff and operational responsibilities. Plan for future new station located to support reduced response times.

Major Tasks:

- Engage the Cities in planning for facilities-related needs.
 - Short term needs include additional space to accommodate new battalion chief positions and new hires.
 - Long-term, the existing two fire stations need to be reconstructed pursuant to recent facilities study.
- Plan to finance, purchase, and specify two new engines.
- Monitor OSHA requirements to bring about compliance concerning facilities.

Timeline:

- Develop funding options for fire engines in Spring, 2025.
- The fire department needs to be included in infrastructure plans for both cities. (Plans in development 2024)
- Urgent needs for space must be met by July 2025 (when battalion chiefs are in place).
- Engines specified in 2028 or earlier for 2030 delivery.

Performance Indicators:

- Facilities improved to meet expanded leadership and crew numbers.
- Long-term facilities planning is underway, in concert with cities.
- New engines specified and in operations on schedule.

Initiative 3: Employee Recruitment and Retention

While Initiative One is focused on expanding operational and leadership capacity, this initiative is focused more on organizational culture and processes that support hiring and retention.

Overall Objective:

SMFD becomes and remains an employer of choice, recruiting and retaining excellent staff. SMFD must also develop and implement recruiting strategies suitable for the current and projected tight market for firefighters.

Major tasks:

- Study and plan to hire people without experience or training (e.g., cadet programs).
- Develop and implement marketing strategies to attract employees.
- Develop strategy to reduce lateral departures. Look at SMFD “Value proposition” for employees.
- Continue to pursue firefighter wellness efforts.
- Continue to engage firefighters and officers in various leadership development efforts, including internally led programs.

Implementation Notes Concerning this Initiative:

- Firefighter hiring applies to both Initiatives 1 and 3. It is supported by SAFER grant funding.
- These programs require staff time and enthusiastic dedication; staff are already highly committed to normal operational duties.
- SMFD will seek to engage city communication teams to assist in marketing strategies for recruitment.
- Increase engagement with local colleges through job fairs and presentation to firefighter classes.
- Consider engaging high schools to participate in job fairs and to explore offering EMT and/or Firefighter classes in high schools.

Timeline:

- Pursue hiring of firefighters consistent with Board-adopted Standards of Cover:
 - Hire eight firefighters in 2025 pursuant to the SAFER grant.
- Engage with colleges in 2025.
- Determine potential for high school programs in 2026 and begin implementation in 2027.
- Follow development and integration of battalion chief positions (noted in Initiative 1) with leadership development aimed at officers and emerging leaders. (2025-2027)

Performance Indicators:

- Hiring completed on schedule.
- Leadership development and wellness programs continue (with new leadership content) year after year.
- College recruitment participation increased in 2025 and 2026.
- High school program feasibility evaluated in 2025 and implemented, if indicated, in 2026 and 2027.
- Firefighter retention improvements are noted year over year.

Initiative 4: Operational Improvement

The department already functions at a high level and is regarded as a leader among local agencies. The purpose of this initiative is to maintain, and to some degree accelerate, continuous improvement. It includes updating documentation to reflect current practices, along with continuous improvement of those practices. EMS quality assurance processes will be formalized and practiced as well.

Overall Objectives:

Develop standards and measures for improvement for all aspects of operations, and train and prepare to consistently meet standards and progress in important areas.

Major tasks:

- Develop and implement a pre-plan program for industrial, commercial, and multi-unit residential occupancies.
- Respond to new OSHA requirements for emergency response.
- Implement quality assurance program for EMS.
- Update standard operating guidelines (SOGs) to reflect current operations.
- Implement changes to comply with adopted SMFD Standards of Cover.

Timeline:

- Pre-plan program outline complete in 2024.
- Compliance with OSHA requirements for the fire service will be determined by OSHA adoption and will be ongoing.
- Quality assurance program for EMS implemented by Summer 2025.
- SOG update completed by Fall 2025.

Performance Indicators:

- Pre-plans maintained and updated according to program parameters.
- Meeting or exceeding quality standards established for EMS service delivery.
- After-action reviews (formal or informal) reflect substantial adherence to SOGs.

Initiative 5: Community Risk Reduction

The “best” fire or emergency is the one that never occurs. This initiative increases the capacity and efforts of SMFD to support community safety and resilience, beginning with an analysis of community risks that will be used to prioritize and guide efforts.

Overall Objectives:

To expand from current efforts that are focused on fire prevention to full community risk reduction, guided by an analytical community risk assessment, and implemented on an ongoing basis.

Major tasks:

1. Complete a full community risks assessment.
2. Hire overdose risk mitigation specialist.
3. Develop and implement communication strategies to empower residents to mitigate risks and prepare for emergencies.
4. Consider the addition of a new full-time community risk reduction specialist.

Implementation Notes Concerning this Initiative:

A formal community risk assessment is to be completed by SMFD personnel in concert with contracted subject matter experts. While the department currently is operating based on an intuitive understanding of community risks, a thorough assessment will help the department to prioritize programming to achieve maximum impact.

A grant is pending for a full-time overdose risk mitigation specialist. If grant application is denied, the department will work with cities on alternative approaches to mitigate this significant community health risk factor.

The department will engage with communications departments of both cities to develop an integrated communications strategy aimed at empowering residents to mitigate risks and prepare for emergency events. Priorities are to be informed by the community risk assessment.

A full-time community risk reduction specialist may be considered after execution of the current hiring plan, i.e., after 2027. Responsibilities for such a position would include:

- Liaison and cooperation with West Saint Paul Police, South Saint Paul Police, and Dakota County public safety and public health agencies.
- Execute ongoing social media communication with the public.
- Present and coordinate fire survival, fire prevention, and health-related public education programming.
- Function as a public information officer for the department in concert with command.

Timeline:

- Community Risk Assessment completed by June 2025.
- Overdose specialist hired under grant or alternatives identified by Spring, 2025.
- Community empowerment strategy in place and communication rolling out by December 2025.

Performance Indicators:

- Specific performance indicators will be determined by the community risk assessment.

Conclusion

This strategic plan reflects the best strategic thinking and teamwork of all ranks of the South Metro Fire Department. It begins with a new statement of SMFD's mission and core values, and an assessment of the agency's strengths, limitations, and external factors that affect our ability as an agency to achieve that mission.

The five interrelated strategic initiatives aim to build on South Metro's strengths and to mitigate our weaknesses. We recognize that the timeline of these initiatives will shift based on our experience in implementing them, the availability of funding and other resources, and potentially with other emergent priorities. The strategy is intended to guide actions alongside SMFD's already demanding workload, to assure that available mindshare, staff time, and other resources are allocated to the continuous improvement of the agency, assuring our long-term success.

This full draft is now ready for review and any amendments by the South Metro Fire Department Board of Directors. That Board has already been identified as a key strength of the agency, providing sound governance and consistent support to the Fire Chief and leadership team.

Appendix: Strategic Planning Process Overview

The strategic plan was undertaken by SMFD as an internal effort facilitated by an outside consultant as part of a broader, ongoing leadership development effort. The document reflects input from the entire department as described below, and has been approved, in substance, by a meeting of all officers. The Fire Chief retains the ultimate authority for approving the document to be submitted to the Board of Directors. With the Board's approval, the Fire Chief remains the executive authority responsible for guiding implementation of the strategy. If that implementation is successful, however, every member of the department will participate in it in one way or another.

The leadership team was first engaged in this strategy process in 2023, with the drafting of a new mission statement and set of core values. While the former words remained relevant, none of the current leadership or rank and file had participated in the creation of those words, and so the engagement of the current team began with multiple facilitated discussions and exercises about the "essence" of SMFD, and about the values that reflect our agency at its best. The mission statement and core values were drafted, and then left to set for several months, to see whether they remained compelling to the leadership team when seen through fresh eyes. With very minor verbal changes, those documents were agreed upon by the leadership team and have been approved by the Fire Chief.

The process of gathering strategic input began with the rank and file. Each shift participated in a facilitated strategic planning workshop to provide input to an initial SLOT analysis and to identify key strategic priorities for initiatives. Firefighters unable to participate on shift were offered individual or small-group sessions to obtain their input. Union officials also participated in this process, either on shift or as individuals.

The consultant then conducted individual interviews with each officer at all ranks. Impressions from the shift meetings were shared as starting points, and each officer's individual perspectives were noted and integrated into an initial draft. The Fire Chief provided further input to this initial draft.

The leadership team (all ranking officers) then met over three sessions to review increasingly complete drafts of the strategic plan. The consultant conducted some individual interviews and reviewed related documents to improve each draft. Notable documents included the recent Standards of Cover and facilities studies.

This document is a refinement of the most recent draft on which the leadership team commented, in September of 2024. It is ready for approval by the Fire Chief, and then by the Board of Directors.