

County of Santa Cruz

Fire Department Advisory Commission (FDAC)

Feedback to Board of Supervisors on the 2023 County Fire Master Plan Report, presented by AP Triton January 2024

In December 2023, a final County Fire Master Plan report was received by the FDAC. The report, which was prepared by AP Triton for the CAO's office, was 272 pages long and included the following sections:

- Section I-A Evaluation of Current Conditions
- Section I-B Support Programs
- Section II: Community Risk Assessment
- Section III: Findings and Recommendations
- Section IV: Appendices

The report was submitted to the Fire Department Advisory Commission in late December, 2023 and was reviewed and discussed by the commission at the Jan 17, 2024 meeting. The Commission finds the following:

Overall:

- The Commission finds that the report has many essential elements of a Master Plan, with next steps being the creation of an achievable strategic plan and operational objectives.
- This report is a very good detailed assessment of the County Fire operations.
- The report is detailed and contains information that the commission is pleased to see, and which can be valuable in crafting a master plan.
- The Commission finds that some of the data presented is inaccurate. The Commission acknowledges this finding by AP Triton: There were significant challenges with the data for statistical and performance analysis.
- The Commission would like to highlight that the recommendations in the document were made by AP Triton, with no input from Cal Fire or the FDAC. Overall, FDAC input on the report was minimal.

Findings:

The Commission agrees with most of the findings laid out in the assessment. The Commission would like to point out that these findings, when taken together, tell a story:

- The Santa Cruz County Fire Department (SCCFD) does not have a strategic plan.

- Management goals and objectives have not been documented and are not clearly expressed.
- With its close relationship to CAL FIRE, SCCFD does not appear to have an independent identity.
- The role of the Fire Department Advisory Commission needs to be reviewed, updated, and clarified.
- The reporting relationship between the Santa Cruz County Fire Department to the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors is through the County's General Services Department.

It is the Commission's view that the findings are directionally correct and highlight the need for additional work to be done in the areas of fire safety and prevention.

Recommendations:

AP Triton made 12 Short-term, 3 Mid-Term and 3 Long-Term recommendations. The Commission finds:

1. All recommendations are not equal. Some are relatively simple to implement, others will take effort.
2. Almost all of the recommendations will require investment from County Fire and others. This could be in the form of effort or money or both. The Commission is concerned that due to the time and effort involved, these recommendations will not be acted upon. The Commission urges the Board of Supervisors to allocate appropriate resources to ensure that this report results in actions.
3. Some of these recommendations will have a significant financial impact on the viability of Fire Service in the County Fire service Area.

At the January Commission meeting, the Commissioners considered and voted on each recommendation. Below are the recommendations and the votes for each:

Short Term Recommendations:

A-1: Emphasize Quality Assurance for Time Data Inputs

Commission Vote To Support This Recommendation: Unanimous

Commentary: The Commission agrees that good data is essential and we would like to see this issue of data collection prioritized by Cal Fire and the County CAO's office.

A-2: Contract with CAL FIRE for one (1) Schedule A Deputy Chief

Commission Vote To Support This Recommendation: Zero

Commentary: The Commission is not sure that this is the right answer, given the current state of the contract / organization. Cal Fire also agrees that this position is not needed based on the current organization.

A-3: Contract with CAL FIRE for one (1) Schedule A Division Chief

Commission Vote To Support This Recommendation: 4 voted yes, 2 voted not now until role is more clearly defined

Commentary: The Commission is not sure that this is the right answer. That said, this position or equivalent staffing capacity may be needed to implement other recommendations. CalFire Chief believes this is needed.

A-4: Review Incident Data Annually

Commission Vote To Support: Unanimous

Commentary: The Commission agrees that an annual review of incident data would be highly desirable.

A-5: Complete a 3–5-Year Strategic Plan

Commission Vote To Support: Unanimous

Commentary: The Commission agrees that this needs to be done. The Commission would like to see clear ownership, and a timeline, for this action to be completed.

A-6: Improve Volunteer Company Activity Data Collection

Commission Vote To Support: Unanimous

Commentary: The Commission agrees that good data is essential and would like to see this issue of data collection prioritized by Cal Fire and the County CAO's office.

A-7: Improve Service Delivery by Staffing Three Stations 24/7/365

Commission Vote To Support: Unanimous Support with additional funding

Commentary: The Commission's view is that this is something that we all want, this is something our community needs. The Commission believes that this recommendation will require substantial additional funding sources and cannot be accomplished with current funding.

A-8: Set and Adopt Performance Goals

Commission Vote To Support: Unanimous

Commentary: The Commission agrees that performance goals are essential to tracking and improving performance. We would like to see County Fire come up with suggestions on the goals and how to measure them. The Commission would like to be involved in more dialog on this.

A-9: Consider Proposing a Special Assessment to Generate Revenue from CSA 4

Commission Vote To Support: Commission believes this is outside our scope

Commentary: The Commission agrees that CSA4 needs additional revenue sources

A-10: Conduct a Volunteer Satisfaction Survey

Commission Vote To Support: Unanimous

Commentary: The Commission ran a survey in the last 2 years and we agree that this should be done on a regular basis.

A-11: Develop a Public Information Campaign

Commission Vote To Support: Unanimous

Commentary: The Commission believes that this is needed, we need the community to better understand the services that the County Fire department provides.

A-12: Review and Revise Santa Cruz County Code, Chapter 2.120, Fire Department Advisory Commission

Commission Vote To Support: Unanimous

Commentary: The Commission agrees that the FDAC in its current form is not serving the County appropriately. The code should be reviewed and changed. Commission members would like to be involved in the change.

Medium Term Recommendations:

B-1: Establish a Program for Staffing Stations During Peak Demand Hours

Commission Vote To Support: Unanimous

Commentary: The Commission is in support, as long as the funding supports this and if this is operationally feasible.

B-2: Develop Risk-Based Public Education Programs for Department-Wide Delivery

Commission Vote To Support: Unanimous

Commentary: The Commission is in support

B-3: Apply for a SAFER Grant to Hire a Volunteer Recruitment and Retention Coordinator

Commission Vote To Support: Unanimous

Commentary: The Commission is in support and would like to see this expanded to additional grant opportunities.

Long-Term Recommendations:

C-1: Re-Evaluate Station Locations and Effectiveness Following Staffing Improvements and New Response Data

Commission Vote To Support: Unanimous

Commentary: The Commission believes we need much more analysis and discussion on this recommendation.

C-2: Create a Comprehensive Capital Improvement Plan

Commission Vote To Support: Unanimous

Commentary: The Commission believes we need much more analysis and discussion on this recommendation.

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