



Mosquito Fire Protection District

Strategic Plan 2019

I. Introduction:

The Mosquito Fire Protection District (MFPD) is at a crossroads. Resources have dwindled and costs have risen; the strong tradition of volunteer community firefighters has ebbed; and the District faces unprecedented levels of wildfire risk along with medical emergencies. Still, numerous opportunities exist to improve the situation. This plan is a first step to identify and prioritize options. It establishes directions MFPD can move to strengthen its impact and to align with perceived community preferences. It is a living document that will continue to be developed at an operational level in collaboration with the staff and with on-going community input, evolving as situations change and new options are identified and integrated.

II. Our Reality:

Accepting our reality as a remote rural district.

Our community is small, dispersed, and relatively isolated. Residents are mixed in terms of age, income levels, skills, experience, and points of view. Many households live on limited incomes.

Mosquito is heavily forested, with high fuel loads and wildfire risk.

There is a significant time gap between the onset of an emergency (medical or fire) and the time first responders can arrive, compared to urban areas. Self-care and knowledge of appropriate procedures become important. Outside emergency response takes 45 minutes or more.

The fire department receives a limited number of calls (ca. 213 yearly, 2016-2018). Rescue and medical emergency calls are the most common, averaging 57% of the calls—quadruple the next largest category, severe weather & natural disaster calls. Fires account for 10% of calls.

Living within our limited means.

Our community has limited financial resources. Utilizing reserves on an annual basis to address funding shortages is not an option. If we want more than we can afford, we must find ways to generate the additional revenue.

Building a stronger and more sufficient community.

People who live in small, remote rural communities have to rely on themselves and each other. The better educated regarding emergency prevention and response each member is, the stronger the community. The more aware each member is of the resources available, the more able that member is to get care when needed.

Effective reduction of risks (medical emergency, wildfire, structure fire)

We endeavor to provide the highest level of service within the restraints of financial resources. This includes participation in mutual aid and shared training arrangements with neighboring districts. Good governance, transparency, accountability, efficiency, and two-way communication are essential. Building sustainability is a key consideration.

III. What we want to do

Where do we want to be heading? Toward financial stability, improved revenues, community engagement, and better service levels--all will probably agree on such generalities. We want to provide the basis to move in those directions, taking into account the financial and social realities of the district.

But we need to operationally implement those aims. As stated above they are simply platitudes. How do we define improved service? What purposes do we want the stability and revenues to serve? For instance, in the long run we might aspire to earning better ratings from the insurance industry, thus improving residents' access to fire insurance at a reasonable price. We might also want to establish, say, 80% compliance with NFPA standards for arrival times by crews to each type of emergency. There might be something about public knowledge of and compliance with defensible space, smoke alarm, and emergency evacuation preparations. Here we want to get started by developing an initial set of strategic aims – an urgent task that needs to involve community and professional input. Setting specific targets and service standards will be part of the later operational planning tasks.

Public perception is critical. We need to show Mosquito residents that this Strategic Plan, by providing goals and direction, is a tool to facilitate discussion, build consensus, and jump-start the process toward a stronger fire protection district.

We start by adopting the stated mission of the MFPD and proposing a vision and a statement of values. From there we turn to a set of proposed goals, with objectives for each and activities through which to attain them.

IV. Guiding Principles

MFPD MISSION

The Mission of the Mosquito Fire Protection District is to provide to the people of the community services that will protect life, save property, and ensure public health and safety. This shall be done by applying the best available methods of risk mitigation, fire suppression and emergency medical response through efficient use of personnel, equipment, training, prevention, and public engagement.

MFPD VISION

The MFPD will be a well governed public service entity, deeply engaged with its community in reducing fire risks and providing medical and fire emergency response via efficient fire department operations that utilize a mix of volunteer and paid staff to meet agreed upon service standards. Community education and involvement in fuel reduction, emergency preparedness, and volunteer assistance for diverse District functions will inform and strengthen community input to policy matters, service levels desired, governance, and material support.

MFPD VALUES

- We value autonomy / local control.
- We value the diversity of our community in terms of age, income levels, skills, experience and points of view.
- We value the fact that our community is small and dispersed.
- We value the rural nature of our community.
- We value a fire department that recognizes that rural nature and works with it.
- We value the self-reliant and talented individuals in our community who wish to participate in accomplishing the objectives.
- We value a fire organization, therefore, that strives to develop a culture of volunteerism.

- We value fiscal security and financial prudence.
- We value a fire department that efficiently strives to provide the highest level of service within the limitations of available financial resources—if possible with 24/7 coverage.
- We value common sense in political, administrative and operational decision making.
- We value a community which is informed, understands the mission and vision of the Mosquito Fire Protection District and has buy-in on the plans and actions being implemented.
- We value the interests and financial situation of all our community residents and strive to balance the level and quality of medical and fire response services with the affordability of same.

V. Goals, Objectives, Activities

In the following the goals and objectives are strategic, intended to provide overall direction to the efforts of the District. The activities are illustrative of what is meant by the goals and objectives; they may evolve or be superseded.

Goal 1. Financial Stability

Goal Statement. Financial stability implies living within our means while developing ways to increase them. Given the continuing decline of MFPD revenues by inflation, long term fiscal stability implies generating more revenue to improve both operations and asset stewardship.

We need to accurately estimate and start covering asset maintenance and replacement needs. To improve volunteer staffing we need resources for marketing and recruitment, training, turn-outs, insurance, health and fitness evaluations, stipends, and other incentives, both to attract residents and to compete with other fire districts that offer more attractive packages to young academy graduates. Increased coverage of emergency services will similarly imply other costs, likely greater.

Objective 1.1. Fiscal prudence.

Activity 1.1.1. Budget conservatively; keep expenditures within available revenue.

Activity 1.1.2. Manage and replenish reserve funds, consistent with need levels established for each fund.

Activity 1.1.3. Establish oversight and monitoring processes to ensure effective, efficient, and compliant use of grants and other funding.

Objective 1.2. **Improved revenues.** Options include:

Activity 1.2.1. Foster fee-for-service activities (incident management & strike teams etc.), budgeting them conservatively to ensure erring on the low side.¹ (These may also provide firefighters with improved opportunities for training and experience.)

Activity 1.2.2. Pursue grant opportunities where feasible (equipment, training, personnel, volunteer recruitment & retention, fuel reduction, etc.).

Activity 1.2.3. Consider proposing a supplemental tax measure based on a clear, community supported plan to meet well defined needs.

Activity 1.2.4. Explore possible benefits of reorganization of the District that might improve funding (i.e., consolidation, conversion to a community services district, etc.).

Activity 1.2.5. Move toward full coverage of asset replacement and improvement needs via annual funding of reserves and capital improvement funds, establishing and updating regularly a reserve study linked to a capital maintenance / improvement plan covering all assets.

Activity 1.2.6. Replace/acquire assets economically. Buy fire equipment at discount, seek grant funding, purchase with low interest loans.

Objective 1.3. **Other Resources Mobilized** to support the mission.

Activity 1.3.1. Encourage generation of additional revenue sources (i.e., via breakfasts, sales, donations, etc.) in collaboration with community & firefighter organizations. (See also Goal 4)

Activity 1.3.2. Develop MFPD as a desired place to learn and participate as an employee or volunteer; identify and adopt successful personnel practices.

¹ Fee-for-service and other revenue generation methods may require some pump-priming investment. If that makes it necessary to temporarily draw on reserve funds to present a balanced budget (since revenues not yet earned cannot be listed under County rules), it should be clarified that this is not done to support current operations but only as part of a plan to grow revenues, replacing the reserves with income generated from fee-for-service activities like incident management and strike teams, etc.

Goal 2. Community Risk Reduction

Goal Statement. The MFPD, in partnership with other organizations, will organize activities and educational opportunities to increase local capacity for hazard reduction, emergency preparedness and risk mitigation in advance of an event, thereby engaging and enabling its citizens.

Risk reduction measures must tackle three kinds of risk—wildfire, structure fire, and medical emergency. Preventative and preparatory measures may include defensible space, home hardening, fuel reduction, emergency warning systems, evacuation plans (wildfire); smoke alarms, family escape plans, home inspections (structure fires); and first aid / CPR training, health monitoring, home safety methods (medical emergency). MFPD can help improve outcomes using a multi-pronged, partnership approach.

Note: Public education and outreach on preventative and preparatory measures against wildfire, structure fire, and medical emergency are addressed under Goal 4, Objective 5

Objective 2.1 Partner with the Mosquito Fire Safe Council to develop and implement a revised Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) periodically as required.

Activity 2.1.1 Establish effective liaison with the Fire Safe Council to provide input and participate fully in development of the revised CWPPs for 2020 and subsequently.

Activity 2.1.2 Organize with community entities and interested individuals to create and implement a comprehensive risk mitigation plan that builds on the CWPP and addresses medical emergency, home hardening and household preparedness, among others.

Objective 2.2 Establish guidelines and procedures for development and implementation of a comprehensive fuel reduction program in the community.

Activity 2.2.1 Support the current Fire Safe Council Fuel Reduction Grant via actions like making and reporting in-kind contributions, providing input on scope of work and areas to be treated, and identifying and engaging in potential training opportunities.

Activity 2.2.2 Clarify and communicate MFPD role in relation to the 2019 County fuel reduction ordinance, as the County refines its ordinance implementation plans.

Activity 2.2.3 Collaborate with the Fire Safe Council to complete the annual risk assessment that allows for renewal of the Firewise Community designation.

Activity 2.2.4 Consider the advisability of applying directly for fuel reduction grants.

Objective 2.3 Reaffirm (or improve) and circulate the current community evacuation plan. Establish a regular practice schedule for the community and a procedure to ensure regular review of the plan.

Activity 2.3.1 Partner with other community organizations, the Sheriff's Office, and other county agencies to establish an annual evacuation training program.

Activity 2.3.2 Meet with USFS to consider improving the Mosquito Road evacuation route through the forest (or others).

Goal 3. Emergency Service Provision

Goal Statement. Due to financial restraints the continued development of a well trained, well equipped, and well managed combination fire department offers the best available route to acceptable levels of emergency services provision. A combination fire department consists of paid personnel, volunteer fire fighters, support group members, and auxiliary organizations. Acceptable levels of emergency service imply 24/7 coverage or as close to it as feasible.

The MFPD needs to revive the emphasis on acquiring and retaining volunteer fire fighters. We must immediately undertake a rebuilding process to recruit volunteers, train them to standards and requirements, equip them properly, and support them continuously. This will take time, a great deal of effort, public contact, staff support, and leadership. It is a difficult task but not impossible. It is vital that all paid personnel support developing a viable volunteer cadre.

Given the amount and variety of training required, a training program developed and implemented by a certified training officer is essential.² Cooperation with neighboring fire districts can enhance training opportunities and increase efficiency.

Objective 3.1 Establish the highest level of service to the community within the limitations of a balanced budget.

Activity 3.1.1 Develop a staffing model that supports a combination fire department, oriented to increasing the volunteer component.

Activity 3.1.2 Establish an on-going program for volunteer recruitment and retention, with robust marketing, training, incentive, and recognition components.

² Senate Bill 1207 (2002) requires volunteer firefighters to meet the same California OSHA standards as career fighters. The NFPA 1001 standard identifies minimum job performance requirements for career and volunteer firefighters. Currently, some 246 hours of training are required to comply with the NFPA 1001 training standards (California State Firefighters Association in association with the Fire Service Training Institute, 2nd edition, Volunteer Firefighter Training Syllabus). These requirements take a great deal of time and commitment from individuals desiring to serve as volunteer firefighters, making necessary a training program developed and implemented by a certified training officer, with full support of all paid personnel.

A risk assessment of the District needs to be done to determine the quantity and quality of training necessary to mitigate the risks (see also Firewise Community Risk Assessment, Goal 2, Activity 2.3).

Goal 4. Community Engagement

Goal Statement. The MFPD will maintain productive and mutually beneficial relationships with its citizens and community organizations through strengthened organizational links, enhanced communications and activities, and robust volunteer participation of varied kinds. Those relationships will increase financial, community and personnel support for the MFPD.

Volunteers are understood as anyone with a relevant skill or interest they are willing to share. Some with capacity to provide emergency services will be firefighters. Others will provide volunteer services of other sorts, such as operational support, fundraising, community outreach and education, and risk mitigation.

[Note: the illustrative activities drafted for this Community Engagement goal should be considered tentative until they can be vetted and improved by the partner organizations, in keeping with the spirit of cooperation and teamwork to which we aspire. MFPD will benefit from input, feedback, and close collaboration in the course of reviewing and improving them.]

Objective 4.1 Strengthen the role of the Support Group.

Illustrative activities:

- Link the Support Group to outreach activities and recruitment of volunteers (firefighters, Support Group members, and others). They are a direct link to the community.
- Build a database on sources of volunteer support from the community in a range of skills and tools needed by the fire department, such as plumbing, electrical, and construction; cranes, tractors, and other equipment; fundraising and proposal writing; and education and outreach.
- Involve the Support Group in relevant activities of the Auxiliary and other local organizations as advocates for the Fire Department in support of community relations.
- Channel information on Support Group activity and tasks accomplished to public media, community outreach, and reports to the board.

Objective 4.2 Encourage auxiliary organizations to mobilize financial and other support for MFPD outside the public finance framework.

Illustrative activities:

- Clarify the role of contributing entities in providing leadership in community and private sector fundraising as well as in community involvement and engagement.

- Foster annual activity plans around firm and attainable fundraising targets.
- Develop a communications strategy and plan: utilize existing organizational communications vehicles; develop a social media policy.
- Implement a volunteer recognition program.

Objective 4.3 **Strengthen connections with community organizations**

Illustrative activities:

- Continue to cooperate with pertinent activities of local partners, such as community clean-up days, firewise picnics, fuel reduction projects, or firefighter festivals, providing support as needed.
- Establish periodic collaboration workshops with other community organizations to discuss needs and solutions.
- Establish MOUs between entities to include revenue commitments, expectations, mutual obligations, and services.

Objective 4.4 **Create a grant writing team**

Illustrative activities:

- Identify cross-organization personnel to assume leadership.
- Track opportunities; determine MFPD interests; generate grant submission calendar.
- Document generic in-kind contribution arrangements.
- Clarify policies and procedures needed to obtain and manage grants.

Objective 4.5 **Partner with community organizations to develop public education/outreach on preventative and preparatory measures**

Illustrative activities:

- Medical Preparedness Workshops.
- Evacuation Planning and Emergency Warning Systems.
- Wildfire, Structure Fire, Natural Disaster Preparedness.
- Defensible Space and Home Hardening.
- Home Safety, smoke alarms, and family emergency plans.

- Establish community databases (e.g., special needs, non-technological communications, phone chains).
- Market district benefits, objectives and successes to the community and beyond.

Goal 5. Good Governance

Goal Statement. Achieve the best possible procedures for making and implementing decisions with transparency, accountability, efficacy, efficiency, sustainability, and two-way communication. In short, democratic process and commonsense approaches in decision-making, politically, administratively and operationally.

Objective 5.1. Ensure transparency, public participation, and information flow to the community and to decision makers

- Activity 5.1.1. Make well-advertised search processes the norm for open senior positions.
- Activity 5.1.2. Hold regular public meetings and have presence at community events.
- Activity 5.1.3. Develop systematic social media and web-based communications.
- Activity 5.1.4. Organize public consultation on expectations for response to fires and medical emergencies and acceptable coverage schedules and cost levels.
- Activity 5.1.5. Foster constituent dialogue to develop a clear notion of what can be achieved in terms of financial stability, improved revenues, and better service over the next few years, and the need for public input and support.

Objective 5.2. Continue to coordinate with County entities and other emergency services districts to meet shared goals (e.g., improved policies, levels of service, funding, shared resources, etc.). For instance, work with the County to improve ambulance service, or to encourage State agencies to move toward improved insurance ratings (more responsive to firewise activities, defensible space, and other risk reduction achievements).

Objective 5.3. Sustainability. Building financial, organizational, and staffing sustainability are key to the success of MFPD.

Objective 5.4. Regular review and updating of MFPD policy and procedure manuals.

Objective 5.5. **Continued focus on accountability** in terms of budgets and control of expense, compliance with legal requirements (e.g., the Brown Act, county regulations, etc.), and assessing results of district programs and personnel.

Objective 5.6. **Periodic review of the strategic plan**, linking it to the annual budgeting process and long-range resource development, to provide a sound framework for effective decision-making to optimize resources and services in an evolving context.

VI. Measures of Success

Defining expected results with timelines, and indicators of progress will be part of the next phase of planning, as strategies are converted into operational plans in collaborative efforts by the fire department Chief and staff, the community partners, and the MFPD board.

Three public workshops should report on progress and receive feedback annually: a mid-FY review of progress toward budgetary and strategic goals each January; the budget workshop to discuss priorities and budget levels in April; and an evaluation in September of the previous fiscal year exercise: accomplishments, problems, needs, and opportunities. These should build on the existing budget workshop and other ongoing efforts.

Results orientation. During implementation of the plan MFPD will be tracking outcomes, verifying assumptions, cultivating a learning process, and refining our ideas about what can realistically be projected for future years. This will not be done in isolation but in concert with the community, since public confidence and support are a key result. Judicious use of baselines to establish meaningful comparisons will be an important means to measure higher-level results.

Results vs expected: process, intermediate, impact levels

Financial outcomes

Monitoring & evaluation tools

Community feedback

Expected Outcomes: [illustrative examples; final versions to emerge from operational planning.]

Process level:

Training officer active; volunteer recruitment / retention program in place (marketing / outreach plan, training program, incentives, etc.).

Agreements in place with community organizations (cooperation in risk reduction, fundraising, outreach, etc.)

Report on number or % of residents signed up on email list, phone chain, etc.

List of needed improvements available, updated (e.g., radios, station roof, living quarters, training/meeting room, etc.)

Grant writing team producing proposals.

Intermediate results:

Steady increase in volunteer numbers, training levels (firefighters and others)

Regular (at least annual) review of strategic plan and report on progress.

Regular contributions to reserve funds from annual budgets.

Fuel reduction and other grant-supported projects funded, being implemented.

Auxiliary organizations using activities plans to meet funding goals.

Public education / outreach programs operating.

Impact level:

Increase in emergency services coverage (goal: to 24/7 in 4 years).

Funded reserves on path to meet reserve study goals.

Fuel reduction prioritized in CWPP substantially accomplished, being maintained.

Substantial fundraising via auxiliary organizations (goal: >\$100,000/year by 2024).

Successive risk assessments show gains in emergency prevention and preparedness.

Volunteer participation at target levels in all areas, from defensible space and fundraising to support group and firefighters.

[Version of November 14, 2019]