



# STRATEGIC PLAN

## 2025-2029

## Menlo Park FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

Menlo Park, California

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## Acknowledgments

AP Triton extends its gratitude to the District's Board of Directors and the Strategic Planning Committee for their active involvement in shaping a plan that will guide the District over the next five years.

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Melanie Starz, EMS Manager  
Randy Kelly, Training Captain/Paramedic  
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## Introduction & Overview

The Menlo Park Fire District (District) engaged AP Triton to facilitate the development of a strategic plan aimed at guiding the District from January 2025 to December 2029. This plan represents the culmination of these efforts, providing a comprehensive roadmap for the District's future.

This document captures the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Challenges (SWOC) and critical issues identified from the planning workshop and community meeting which informed the initiatives, outcome statements, and action items. This process set priorities, focused energy, strengthened operations, and ensured that staff were aligned toward the common goal of enhancing the quality of life in the community.

A strategic plan is most effective when all levels of the organization are actively involved in its development, allowing for a shared understanding of the challenges facing the District. By collaborating to identify a focused set of initiatives and actionable steps, the organization can ensure that the plan is both widely supported and achievable. The District has been successful in developing this plan with broad support for the initiatives from across all areas of the District.

The steps of the process included:

- **Project Initiation:** AP Triton met with senior leadership to confirm project understanding, outline the steps, and review the work plan. The meeting also covered the timeline, information requests, and monthly virtual follow-ups, which continued until the on-site planning workshop.
- **Strategic Planning Team Formation:** A diverse planning team was assembled, comprising representatives from various divisions, shifts, ranks (including civilian employees), and labor representatives. This team actively participated in the planning process and attended both an evening community meeting and a 2½-day workshop.
- **Environmental Scan:** AP Triton conducted a comprehensive environmental scan, providing an overview of the District's operating environment. The District uploaded critical information that helped identify key issues, which was then compiled into a planning packet for the workshop.

- **Internal and External Surveys:** AP Triton created surveys to gather input from both internal and external stakeholders. After a review by the Fire Chief and Strategic Planning Team, the surveys were finalized and distributed:
  - The internal survey, distributed by the Fire Chief, gathered feedback from all employees.
  - The external survey was posted on the District website and social media, distributed to local businesses, and sent to individuals who had utilized emergency services over the previous six months.
  - A partner agencies survey was also administered, targeting public safety partners and neighboring agencies. This survey sought to assess the effectiveness of collaboration, communication, joint operations, and coordination with the District.
- **Community Meeting:** AP Triton facilitated a community meeting, which provided residents with an opportunity to share their perspective on the agency's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges. The external survey results were reviewed during this meeting, which took place the evening before the planning workshop. A diverse group of community members, including business owners, civic organizations, and non-profit leaders, were invited to participate.
- **Planning Workshop:** The 2½-day planning workshop brought together all the findings from the environmental assessment, surveys, and the community meeting. AP Triton guided the team through a review of the information to develop the first draft of strategic initiatives, outcome statements, and action items.
- **SWOC Analysis:** Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges were identified and assessed. The planning team highlighted critical issues and service gaps that would inform the strategic initiatives.
- **Strategic Plan Components:** The cornerstone of the strategic plan for the District comprises five essential components. Mission Statement, Philosophy, Strategic Initiatives, Outcome Statements, and Action Items
  - **Mission Statements** are concise statements that define the fundamental purpose and reason for the existence of an organization.
  - **Philosophy**, often expressed as vision and values statements, provides long-term aspirations or the desired state along with the guiding principles and beliefs that shape an organization's culture, behavior, and decision-making processes.

- **Strategic initiatives** are broad themes that group areas where there is both need and opportunity to improve service to the community. These initiatives provide a focus of organizational efforts with the pace of improvement determined by the time and resources provided over the term of the five-year strategic plan.
- **Outcome Statements** are a concise and specific declaration that articulates the intended results or achievements of the strategic initiative. It provides clarity on the desired impact that is expected to occur once the initiative is met.
- **Action items** define the steps or actions required to achieve a desired outcome. They provide clarity and accountability, guiding efforts toward tangible results and ensuring alignment with overall strategic aims. An action item is a **S**pecific statement that is **M**easurable, **A**ction-oriented, **R**ealistic, and **T**ime-sensitive. If all action items under an initiative are accomplished, the outcome statement will have been achieved.
- **Final Report and Adoption:** After review by staff, the strategic initiatives and action items were then presented to the governing body for review on December 9, 2020.
- **Implementation and Updates:** The District should routinely review the strategic plan.
  - Quarterly updates provided to the Board of Directors including a review of the initiatives, action items, timelines, and the consideration of new items.
  - Each year a progress report showing completed and upcoming action items should be published in the budget document.
  - In the final year of the plan, the District should conduct a comprehensive progress review and begin developing the next strategic plan to ensure continued alignment with organizational goals.

## The District's Mission and Philosophy

### Mission Statement

***To protect and preserve life and property from the impact of fire, disaster, injury, and illness.***

### Philosophy Statement

We are committed to providing high quality service to our community and our community members. We believe that the success of our organization depends on teamwork, mutual trust and honesty achieved through commitment to the following values:

- **Communication** with one another and with community members
- **Loyalty** to our community, to this organization, and to each other
- **Innovation** in meeting the present and future needs of the District
- **Responsibility** as a team for the efficient and effective delivery of services
- **Pride** in our work, in our dedication to public service, and in being the best we can be



## Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Challenges

As part of the strategic planning process, AP Triton created surveys to gather input from both internal and external stakeholders and facilitated a community meeting, which provided residents with an opportunity to share their perspectives on the agency's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges.

The Planning Committee conducted an in-depth analysis of existing services, projected future growth within the service area, and gathered valuable insights from both internal and external stakeholders. This comprehensive approach enabled the District to identify its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges, positioning the District to proactively address community needs and enhance service delivery.

- **Strengths:** Strengths are internal attributes and resources that contribute positively to an organization's ability to achieve its objectives. These may include skills, assets, capabilities, or qualities that enhance performance, or lead to success in service delivery to the community.
- **Weaknesses:** Weaknesses are internal limitations, deficiencies, or areas of vulnerability that hinder an organization's performance or ability to reach their goals. These could include lack of resources, inadequate skills, poor processes, or any other factors that prevent optimal performance or effectiveness.
- **Opportunities:** Opportunities are external factors or circumstances in the environment that can be leveraged to create positive outcomes or benefits for an organization. These may include emerging trends, technological advancements, new partnerships, or any other favorable conditions that present the potential for efficiencies, innovation, or improvement.
- **Challenges:** Challenges are external or internal obstacles, difficulties, or problems that pose barriers to achieving desired objectives or outcomes. These could include economic downturns, regulatory hurdles, organizational conflicts, or any other factors that require effort, creativity, or strategic planning to overcome.



## Community SWOC Analysis

This chart reflects the community's perspective, gathered during an in-person meeting with community members and supplemented by insights from an extensive community survey conducted by AP Triton.

Strengths		Weaknesses	
Internal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quality of the educational programs for the community.</li> <li>Vision and action to improve fire stations.</li> <li>Resources available—equipment, people, etc.</li> <li>Response when there is an issue, professionalism, emergency and non-emergency, inspections, administration.</li> <li>Community service, going out of their way to help.</li> <li>Strong community involvement, CERT involvement.</li> <li>Collaboration with partner agencies, collaborating initiatives.</li> <li>Social media interactions.</li> <li>Fantastic response times.</li> <li>Well-trained, educated, kind professionals.</li> <li>Wonderful, above-and-beyond service.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not accessing younger generations and families.</li> <li>Ability to email/text residents.</li> <li>Access to a District newsletter</li> <li>Personnel (esp. FF) living out of district.</li> <li>Few followers on social media.</li> <li>Isolation of resource development among the cities.</li> <li>Duplication of processes in permitting between the cities and the district.</li> <li>Financial support of salaries and benefits consistent with community standards. Contributing to retention.</li> <li>Community understanding of emergency evacuation plans.</li> <li>Lack of communication to the cities outside of Menlo Park, Atherton, East Palo Alto, specifically for community meeting.</li> </ul>
Opportunities		Challenges	
External	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collaboration among the cities of resources.</li> <li>Communicate earlier with the water departments for emergencies.</li> <li>Housing opportunities for public safety personnel.</li> <li>FEMA's whole community risk planning (and to be known for it).</li> <li>Consistent use and access to apps collaborated across public safety agencies and cities.</li> <li>Fall reduction program, targeting vulnerable communities, follow-ups and database to better provide/serve/educate.</li> <li>Communication of how emergency alerts are distributed to the community.</li> <li>Identifying commuter/high-traffic response times.</li> <li>Goal-sharing with the cities.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Right resources to the right people at the right time; communicating information to vulnerable populations.</li> <li>Working with partner agencies to provide for the needs and wants of the community.</li> <li>Equity of services received.</li> <li>Density, traffic, etc.</li> <li>Environmental, wildfires, floods.</li> <li>Community growth and District planning.</li> </ul>

## Strategic Planning Committee SWOC Analysis

Strengths		Weaknesses	
Internal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Response times/performance</li> <li>• Financial stability, well-funded</li> <li>• Proactive planning for facilities replacement/relocation</li> <li>• Robust, strong training program</li> <li>• Wellness and fitness program</li> <li>• Labor-management relationship</li> <li>• Staff competency</li> <li>• Ongoing education and training programs, accessibility</li> <li>• Operational competency</li> <li>• Community education opportunities</li> <li>• Professional relationships throughout the district</li> <li>• Employee empowerment</li> <li>• Support from the leadership team</li> <li>• Positive cultural and service mindset; commitment to service</li> <li>• Open-door policy, inclusive culture</li> <li>• Selfless, egoless leadership that is organization-driven</li> <li>• Access to technologically advanced equipment and fleet</li> <li>• Professional family-like atmosphere/culture</li> <li>• Career/specialized opportunities</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workforce diversity (not to be placed before skill and competence)</li> <li>• Salaries do not commensurate with the cost of living in the district</li> <li>• Need more scenario-based training, multi-company</li> <li>• Cultural division and accountability</li> <li>• Performance appraisals need to be updated or revised; consistency, frequency, quality, communication, accountability</li> <li>• Training in soft skills, professional development</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Ripple effect of streamlining efforts on payroll and CAD systems</li> <li>• Isolation of software uses and solutions (e.g., multiple systems used that don't collaborate)</li> <li>• Competing interests in training (daily schedule)</li> <li>• Suspicion and resistance to change</li> <li>• Management needs to continue earning the trust of rank and file</li> <li>• Employee recognition</li> <li>• Retirements/PEPRA</li> </ul>
Opportunities		Challenges	
External	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Process improvements/technologies for tracking performance (data-driven)</li> <li>• Response time expectations, communicating to the public</li> <li>• Communication with the public regarding available resources, access to information, etc.</li> <li>• Management needs to continue earning the trust of rank and file</li> <li>• Residential alternatives</li> <li>• Education to the legislature of the impact of PEPRA</li> <li>• Continued enhancement in the relationship with the executive team and the Board</li> <li>• Explore working relationships for contract negotiations</li> <li>• Community engagement and communication</li> <li>• Recognizing professional excellence</li> <li>• Possibility of shared services</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demographic challenges: Persons over 65, Languages other than English, Population density and health insurance rates in East Palo Alto</li> <li>• Development of multi-story buildings, vertical growth, multi-use facilities</li> <li>• Traffic, congestion, travel time during commuter hours</li> <li>• CalPERS, charter school funding impact on financial stability</li> <li>• Image, name, branding across the service area, especially in East Palo Alto</li> <li>• Supply chain and apparatus replacement planning</li> <li>• Workforce diversity</li> <li>• Employees living further away from the district</li> <li>• Retirement/PEPRA</li> <li>• Aligning desired initiatives with financial resources</li> <li>• Cohesive culture (east-west)</li> <li>• Inclusion</li> </ul>

## Strategic Plan Overview

The Strategic Planning Team conducted an in-depth review of the SWOC analysis to identify issues and gaps. They organized the areas requiring attention into key themes, which were used to develop strategic initiatives. These initiatives are designed to guide the District toward its ultimate goal of providing high quality service to the community.

Fiscal sustainability and responsibility are the foundation of every initiative and goal, ensuring that all decisions and strategies are designed with long-term financial viability in mind. By prioritizing the efficient use of resources and carefully evaluating the economic impact of each action, the District commits to maintaining financial health while delivering on its mission. Every initiative and action item is aligned with this commitment and a timeline linked to a fiscal year, promoting a stable and sustainable future.

The District has identified five initiatives with a total of 23 initial action items for the strategic plan. The District has also committed to the following actions during the life of this plan:

- Quarterly updates provided to the Board of Directors including a review of the initiatives, action items, timelines, and the consideration of new items. The budget process will determine the funding for action items each fiscal year.
- Publishing annual progress reports showing completed and upcoming action items.
- In the final year of the plan, the District will conduct a comprehensive progress review and begin developing the next strategic plan.

### INITIATIVE 1: SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY

Service to the community is the foundation of the District's purpose. This initiative focuses on continuously enhancing emergency response, expanding services, and improving community outreach and public education efforts. The District is committed to not only meeting the current needs of the community but also preparing for future growth and emerging challenges, ensuring a high standard of service delivery at all times.

**Outcome Statement:** The District is providing service that meets or exceeds the needs of the community, while strategically preparing for future growth and challenges.

## INITIATIVE 2: LEADERSHIP

Strong leadership is vital for the District's success. This initiative centers on empowering employees with the necessary skills, tools, and resources to lead effectively at all levels. By developing leadership competencies and improving internal communication, the District aims to cultivate leaders who can guide the organization through challenges and drive future success.

**Outcome Statement:** District employees are equipped to lead with confidence and communicate effectively across all levels of the organization.

## INITIATIVE 3: WORKFORCE DEMOGRAPHIC

The District recognizes the importance of a workforce that reflects the community it serves. By focusing on recruiting high-quality candidates from diverse backgrounds, the District aims to build a team that is both skilled and representative of the community. This initiative is an inclusive approach that enhances the District's ability to serve effectively and fosters greater community trust and engagement.

**Outcome Statement:** The District is hiring high-quality candidates, representative of the community we serve.

## INITIATIVE 4: ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

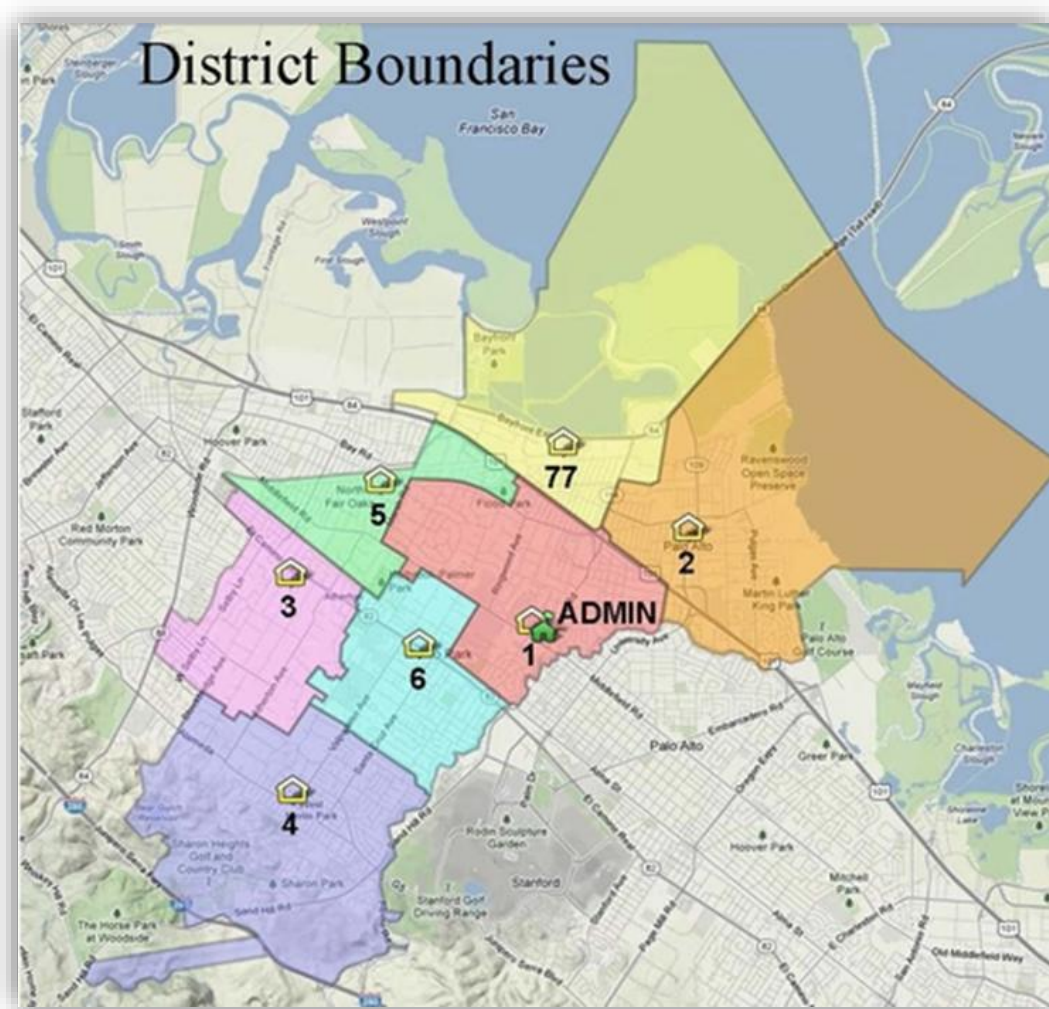
The District is committed to cultivating a mission-driven and inclusive organizational culture. By fostering professional growth, employee engagement, and recognition of excellence, the District supports the continuous development of its workforce. This initiative ensures that employees feel valued and supported, contributing to a strong and cohesive team capable of delivering exceptional service.

**Outcome Statement:** The District is cultivating a mission-driven, inclusive culture that values professional excellence, growth, and recognition.

## INITIATIVE 5: OPERATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

A strong operational infrastructure is essential to support District personnel in performing their responsibilities effectively. This initiative focuses on evaluating and enhancing key functions such as operations technology, procurement, and logistics to ensure they operate efficiently and reliably. By reviewing and optimizing these areas, the District aims to streamline processes, improve resource management, and enhance overall efficiency.

**Outcome Statement:** The District is providing the necessary support for personnel to effectively perform their responsibilities.



## Initiative 1—Service to the Community

**Outcome Statement:** The District is providing service that meets or exceeds the needs of the community, while strategically preparing for future growth and challenges.

### Action Items:

- A.** Review and evaluate response time standards and determine benchmark / baseline metrics.
  - **Responsible:** Operations Chief
  - **Timeline:** FY 2026–27
- B.** Explore and recommend options to provide expanded services.
  - **Responsible:** Deputy Chief
  - **Timeline:** FY 2026–27
- C.** Assess planned growth that may affect service delivery capabilities and develop proactive strategies to mitigate new or increasing risks.
  - **Responsible:** Fire Marshal and Operations Chief
  - **Timeline:** FY 2026–27
- D.** Identify and implement strategies to enhance community engagement, communication, and awareness of the services available from the District.
  - **Responsible:** Risk Reduction Officer II
  - **Timeline:** FY 2026–27
- E.** Review performance metrics and quality of service the dispatch center is providing and determine if any action is required to improve service for the community.
  - **Responsible:** Fire Chief
  - **Timeline:** FY 2025–26
- F.** Review performance metrics and quality of service by the ambulance provider and determine if any action is required to improve service for the community.
  - **Responsible:** Fire Chief, Training Chief and EMS Manager
  - **Timeline:** FY 2026–27



## Initiative 2—Leadership

**Outcome Statement:** District employees are equipped to lead with confidence and communicate effectively across all levels of the organization.

### Action Items:

- A.** Identify leadership competencies and attributes, then develop a plan to improve skills.
  - **Responsible:** Training Chief and Administrative Services Director
  - **Timeline:** FY 2025–26
- B.** Establish a professional development program for non-line staff positions.
  - **Responsible:** Division Leads
  - **Timeline:** FY 2027–28
- C.** Identify the de-motivators to promotions, and (if present) develop actionable strategies to overcome barriers and encourage upward mobility.
  - **Responsible:** Deputy Chief
  - **Timeline:** FY 2025–26
- D.** Review and enhance internal communication methods.
  - **Responsible:** Brett Jensen/Operations Chief
  - **Timeline:** FY 2025–26



## Initiative 3—Workforce Demographic

**Outcome Statement:** The District is hiring high-quality candidates, representative of the community we serve.

### Action Items:

- A.** Review the recent hiring process and establish the best method for hiring quality firefighters.
  - **Responsible:** Fire Chief and Administrative Services Director
  - **Timeline:** FY 2025–26
- B.** Review hiring processes and establish the best method(s) for hiring quality personnel District-wide.
  - **Responsible:** Fire Chief and Administrative Services Director
  - **Timeline:** FY 2026–27
- C.** Create an initiative for the workforce to reflect the demographics of the community that maintain our high standards.
  - **Responsible:** Fire Chief and Administrative Services Director
  - **Timeline:** FY 2026–27





## Initiative 4—Organizational Culture & Professional Development

**Outcome Statement:** The District is cultivating a mission-driven, inclusive culture that values professional excellence, growth, and recognition.

### Action Items:

- A. Provide education on inclusivity throughout the District.
  - **Responsible:** Joint Labor Management Committee and Director of Administration
  - **Timeline:** FY 2026–27
- B. Research and review the concept of “mission-driven culture” and determine how to apply it in the District.
  - **Responsible:** Operations Chief
  - **Timeline:** FY 2026–27
- C. Identify the key policies that need further description on the “why” and expand the “leaders’ intent” as part of the policy.
  - **Responsible:** Operations Chief
  - **Timeline:** FY 2027–28
- D. Review the current performance appraisal system and provide recommendations for an improved or alternative approach.
  - **Responsible:** Human Resources Manager and Matt Menard
  - **Timeline:** FY 2026–27
- E. Evaluate existing processes for recognizing professional excellence and make recommendations for enhancements organizational wide.
  - **Responsible:** EMS Manager and Dave Magnan
  - **Timeline:** FY 2025–26
- F. Evaluate current mission and philosophical statements and consider options to recommend a change to the Board of Directors.
  - **Responsible:** Fire Chief
  - **Timeline:** FY 2026–27

## Initiative 5—Operational Infrastructure

**Outcome Statement:** The District is providing the necessary support for personnel to effectively perform their responsibilities.

### Action Items:

- A. Review the options for managing the operations technology function more effectively.
  - **Responsible:** Operations Chief and IT Manager
  - **Timeline:** FY 2025–26
- B. Review the options for managing the procurement function more effectively.
  - **Responsible:** Finance Manager
  - **Timeline:** FY 2026–27
- C. Review the options for managing facility supplies storage and distribution functions more effectively.
  - **Responsible:** Training Captain
  - **Timeline:** FY 2026–27
- D. Evaluate options for new enterprise resource planning (ERP) system that integrates key organizational functions and processes to improve operational and administrative efficiencies.
  - **Responsible:** Administrative Services Director and Finance Manager
  - **Timeline:** FY 2027–28

