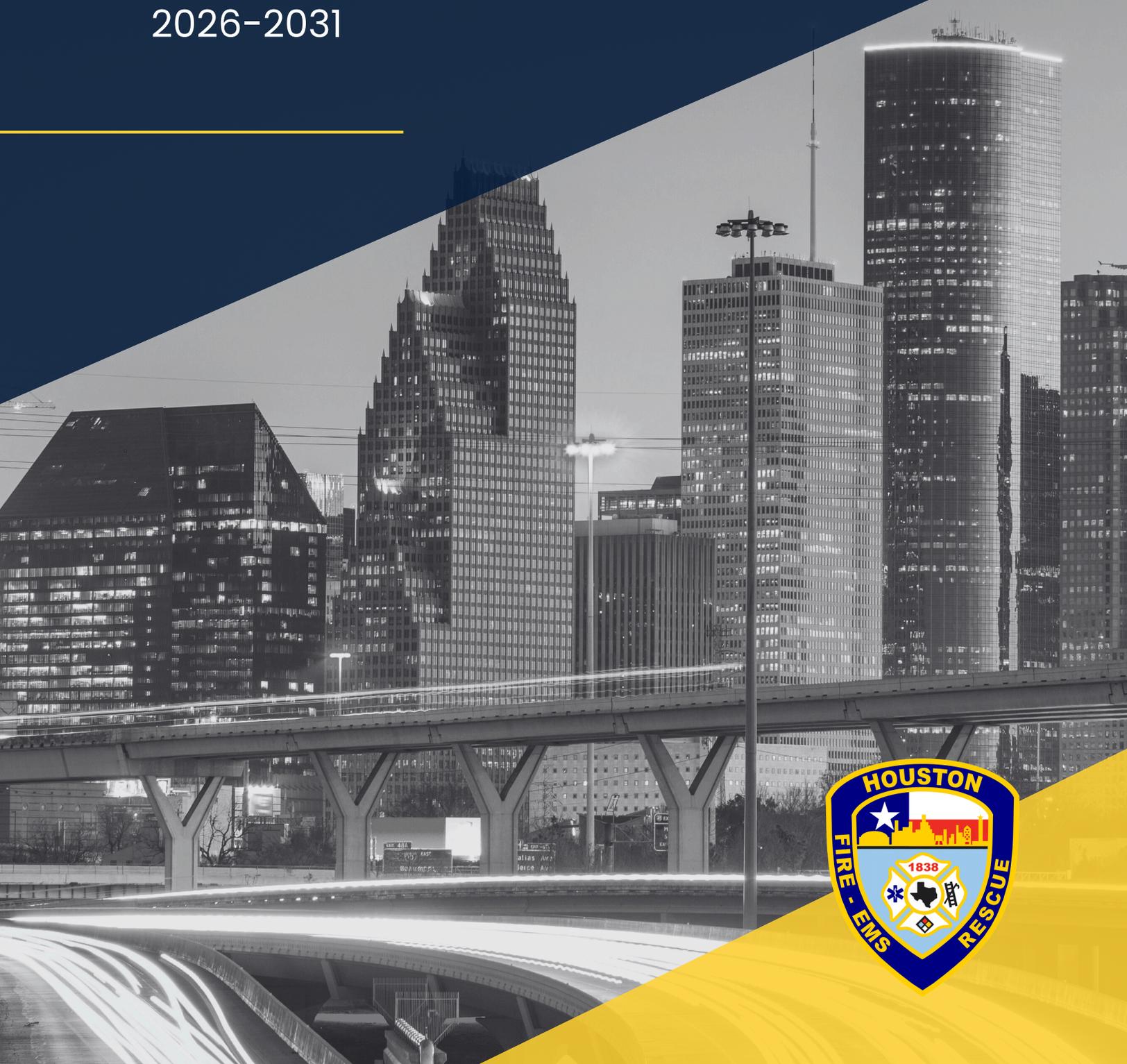HOUSTON FIRE DEPARTMENT

STRATEGIC PLAN

2026-2031

Core Values
Courage, Commitment, and Compassion

Vision Statement
The Houston Fire Department's vision is to provide world-class services that address the ever-evolving scope of hazards and risks by ensuring the safety and support of both its members and the diverse community it serves.

Mission Statement
To save lives, protect property, and serve our community with courage, commitment and compassion.

About Chief Thomas Muñoz

Chief Thomas Muñoz has more than 29 years of experience as a first responder and emergency manager. He served 24 years with the Houston Fire Department, retiring as an Assistant Chief after overseeing Homeland Security, Public Affairs, and HAZMAT. Before being named the department's 37th chief, he served as the City's Emergency Management Coordinator and acting Director for the Mayor's Office of Public Safety and Homeland Security.

Chief Muñoz completed the Executive Leadership and Management Certification from the University of Notre Dame Mendoza School of Business and is a Homeland Security Executive Leadership Program graduate from the Naval Postgraduate School.

He also retired as Commander from the United States Coast Guard (Reserve) after 21 years of service and holds Master's degrees in Emergency Management and Homeland Security from American Military University and a B.A. in Political Science from the University of Houston.

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A Message from the Chief

Throughout my career — serving in command roles within the Houston Fire Department as well as the United States Coast Guard — I have learned that leadership is grounded in clarity of purpose and unity of effort. Missions are accomplished when objectives are defined, needs are identified, resources are aligned, and measurable results guide our actions. These are not simply strategic principles; they are commitments to the people we serve and to one another.

The Houston Fire Department stands on a foundation built by generations of men and women who demonstrated courage, sacrifice, and an unwavering dedication to duty. Their legacy has shaped this Department into one of the finest in the nation. We honor that legacy not only by preserving it, but by advancing it.

This Strategic Plan is not intended to be a document of compliance or a requirement for accreditation. It is a living roadmap — a declaration of vision, accountability, and progress. It represents a shared commitment to excellence and a clear path toward the Department we are determined to become in the years ahead.

I extend my sincere appreciation to all who contributed to this effort — our members, leaders, and valued community stakeholders. The future outlined in these pages reflects both ambition and responsibility. I am confident that, together, we will continue to strengthen this Department, serve our community with distinction, and lead with integrity.

Together, we move forward with purpose, pride, and resolve.

Thomas Munoz
Fire Chief
Houston Fire Department

Introduction

Purpose

The Houston Fire Department publishes a strategic plan to communicate clearly to its members and the public the goals and objectives it intends to pursue for the next five years. This document provides guidance at a department-wide level and requires collaboration from within the Department as well as outside partners. The strategic plan also serves as an accountability tool to ensure progress in pursuing its mission. The Department adopted a deliberate approach in strategic planning to comprehensively assess community needs and to thoughtfully determine potential solutions.

Process

The current strategic planning process began in earnest in September 2024. As the Houston Fire Department encouraged open participation in the process, the content of the strategic plan was not predetermined by a limited number of individuals. The Department concurrently evaluated best practices and standards, reviewed pre-existing plans and initiatives, and sought stakeholder input in the development in this document.

The primary best practices and standards evaluated included those from the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), Center for Public Safety Excellence (CPSE), and Insurance Services Office (ISO). The Houston Fire Department reviewed pre-existing plans and initiatives that have city-wide reach as well as its previous departmental and current divisional plans. Feedback from the Department's stakeholders ultimately serves as the foundation of the strategic plan. The stakeholders not only represent who the Department serves but also whom the Department needs to execute its goals and objectives.

The first phase in gathering stakeholder feedback focused on the external stakeholders. With invitations sent to professional associations, charitable organizations, school districts, places of worship, and others, the Houston Fire Department held meetings with 40 outside organizations from October 2024 to May 2025. The Department also conferred with nearly a dozen other City of Houston departments that serve as longstanding partners. Eight mutual aid departments completed a survey in September/October 2024. In addition, the Department received over 30 responses for a survey distributed to all civic clubs listed with the City of Houston.

For feedback from internal stakeholders, the Houston Fire Department offered multiple avenues to participate. The Department did not restrict participation by rank and

position. Starting in December 2024, the Department held meetings focused on various programs such as arson investigations, emergency communications, health and safety, technical rescue, professional development, and others. In May/June 2025, over 30 stations across each shift had in-person meetings to discuss the strategic plan. Ninety-nine individuals responded to a department-wide survey issued in July 2025.

Criteria

The Center for Public Safety Excellence (CPSE) in its 10th edition of the *Fire and Emergency Service Self-Assessment Manual* establishes eleven performance indicators across three criteria in which accredited agencies are required to describe, appraise, and plan for that are directly related to strategic planning. CPSE developed these performance indicators to apply regardless of the type and size of a department. This strategic plan intends to establish the foundation in meeting these expectations. The Department addresses some of these performance indicators in more detail through internal practices and documents. A list of Criteria used in the development of this Strategic Plan is available appended as *Appendix A*.

About the Houston Fire Department

Along with the more than 2.3 million that reside within the city limits, individuals that work and travel in Houston rely on the Department's services. Regardless of the threat present, the Houston Fire Department is expected to respond quickly with the highest quality and most efficient care possible.

History

The origins of the Houston Fire Department can be traced back to the establishment of the Houston's first volunteer fire department on August 14, 1838 – Protection Fire Company No. 1. Rapid city growth, increased city financial support, and a series of devastating fires

Photo: Family of Ralph Grant

prompted the transition from a volunteer to a paid fire service in Houston in 1895. The Houston Professional Fire Fighters Association became International Association of Firefighters Local 341 in November 1932. The Houston Fire Department provided mutual aid assistance to the Texas City ammonium nitrate explosion in April 1947, which is still considered the deadliest industrial accident in United States history.

The 1950s represented a period of immense growth for the City of Houston and the Houston Fire Department. The fire alarm division began recording all telephone-reported fires in 1950, which allowed playback of conversations to verify addresses. Two separate annexations doubled the size of the city. During the annexations, volunteer stations became permanent Houston Fire Department stations. Integration began with nine black men graduating from the training academy in 1955 to become the Houston Fire Department's first black firefighters.

The current training campus, now known as the Val Jahnke Training Facility, opened in 1969. The 15-acre site started with two classrooms, a service garage, multipurpose auditorium, office building, six-story drill tower, and a two-story fire building. After a study of local medical and public-service communities, the city council entrusted the Department to provide emergency medical services (EMS) due to its

emergency response experience, short response times, and efficient dispatch system in 1971. A series of tragedies prompted the formation of the hazardous materials response team in 1979.

The modernization of the fire service began in the 1980s as mobile automatic status terminals were installed in all fire and EMS units. Improved basic command procedures were also implemented. The Honor Guard, which provides services at ceremonial events including funerals, also began in 1992. In 1999, the Houston Fire Department introduced thermal imagers for all ladder trucks, hazmat units, and rescue trucks.

The Center for Public Safety Excellence (CPSE) bestowed accredited status on the Department in 2001. The Houston Fire Department has maintained this status since, last appearing before the commission in 2021. The Houston Emergency Center opened in 2003 to house emergency communications for both the Houston Police Department and the Houston Fire Department.   The Houston Fire Department relocated its headquarters to the Downtown/Midtown border in 2011. The previous facility continues to be used by the Arson Bureau and Fleet Maintenance Division.

The Houston Fire Department provided support in managing the Astrodome Complex as a mega-shelter during Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Less than a month later, Houston braced itself for Hurricane Rita. Hurricanes continued to be a constant threat to the community with significant damage caused by Hurricane Ike in 2008 and Hurricane Harvey in 2017. The risks involved in firefighting remain ever present. The Houston Fire Department faced its largest casualty event in May 2013 during the Southwest Inn fire with five firefighters killed and 12 injured. The Department also played an active role in COVID-19 pandemic response starting in the spring of 2020. During winter storm Uri in February 2021, call volume increased by 200 percent during a five-day period.

Organization

The Houston Fire Department operates under the governance of the Houston Mayor and City Council. The enabling ordinance "charged with the duty of preventing and extinguishing fire and conflagrations and preventing the loss of human life and property by fire, and doing all such other duties as are imposed upon them by ordinance of the city council." The fire chief has administrative and management leadership responsibilities for the Houston Fire Department. The Houston Fire Department employs nearly 4,000 personnel across a variety of roles. Three executive assistant chief positions have been established to lead the following divisions: Organizational Support, Strategic Operations, and Emergency Operations.

Services

Photo: Rustin Rawlings

Community needs have shaped and defined a vast array of services offered by the Houston Fire Department. As stated on its website, the Houston Fire Department "has evolved into a highly sophisticated public safety rescue system that has saved hundreds of lives and reduced the severity of countless injuries and illnesses" to address ever evolving community risks. The Houston Fire Department has also been a pioneer in developing emergency response capabilities in areas such as hazardous materials (hazmat) response.

Emergency Response

- **Emergency Communications** is conducted by civilian public safety telecommunicators and classified communication captains at the Houston Emergency Center (HEC). The Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) manages incoming emergency calls, dispatches appropriate units, and manages department resources.

- **Fire Suppression** refers to the efforts "directed toward controlling and/or extinguishing fires to protect fires to protect people from injury or death and reduce property loss."   This has been a core function of the Houston Fire Department since its origins as Protection Fire Company, No. 1 in 1836.

- **Emergency Medical Services (EMS)** began in 1971 as the city council placed pre-hospital emergency care in the fire department.   The Houston Fire Department provides transport service with basic life support and advanced life support capabilities.

- **Hazardous Materials Response** bases its operations from Station 22 in southeast Houston. The team maintains technician level capabilities to respond to uncontrolled releases of hazardous and toxic materials. The program started in 1979 due to railroad tank car incidents across the country.   The Houston Fire Department's program served as a model as other departments began to develop hazmat response capabilities in the 1980s and 1990s. Additional unit was added to the team at Station 66 in northwest Houston in early 2021.

- **Aircraft Rescue Firefighting (ARFF)** needs are present at George Bush Intercontinental Airport (IAH) and William P. Hobby Airport (HOU). The three stations at IAH and the station at HOU have an obligation to protect the flying public as well as the aircraft, cargo, and structures. ARFF must meet additional requirements set by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and Texas Commission on Fire Protection (TCFP).

- **Technical Rescue** is defined as the rescuing of trapped or endangered persons from any life-endangering cause such as structural collapse, swift water, or confined space. The Houston Fire Department has strategically located its technical rescue personnel and equipment across three stations: Station 10 in Chinatown, Station 11 near the Heights and Rice Military, and Station 42 north of Magnolia Park.

- **Tactical Deployment Division (TDD)** consists of the Houston Fire Department's operations related to wildland, marine – water strike team, all hazard incident management, emergency medical task force (EMTF), and Texas Task Force 1. Several of these functions predate the formation of TDD in 2019. TDD manages teams that deploy externally and within the jurisdiction.

- **Drones** provide a series of functions that support emergency services to improve situational awareness.

Strategic Operations

- **Planning** encompasses Houston Fire Department's planning and mitigation efforts. This includes efforts related to insurance services office (ISO), agency accreditation, emergency preparedness, strategic planning, and grants. Management of various special events ranging including dignitary visits, sports events, and the rodeo fall under the umbrella of planning.

- **Fire Inspections** intend to reduce risk through the enforcement of the fire code. The Life Safety Bureau under the direction of the fire marshal has responsibility for these functions. The Houston Fire Department created the position of fire marshal in 1910 with inspections of potential fire-hazard structures beginning in the 1920s. The first fire code was adopted in 1973.

- **Fire Investigations** are conducted by the Arson Bureau, which is officed at 1205 Dart Street, north of Downtown. The Arson Bureau has been charged with the responsibility "to lessen the occurrence of illegal fires through aggressive investigation and prosecution."   Personnel assigned to the Arson Bureau also serve as certified law enforcement officers and report to the fire marshal.

- **Public Education** focuses on teaching the public on how to reduce, mitigate, and respond to risk. Activities include station tours, smoke alarm distribution, and safety presentations.

- **Public Information** is under the leadership of the Communications Director. This division has responsibility in delivering information to the public about the department's news and operations through its social media pages, website, and the press. Included within its scope of duties is informing the public of immediate threats to the community.

Signature Achievements

The Houston Fire Department has a storied history and longstanding traditions to be proud of. During the strategic plan development process, members identified the Department's significant achievements. Highlights are listed here to serve as a reminder of what has been and can be accomplished:

- Providing the highest quality of fire protection and medical care for our constituents daily.

- Saving significant number of lives from cardiac arrest and trauma incidents through the skilled delivery emergency medical services (EMS).

- Highly competent special operations teams that is the "cream of the crop."

- Providing support for large-scale events including College Football National Championship, Final Four, Super Bowl, Chevron Houston Marathon, and others.

- Rendering high quality services during major disasters and weather events.

- Unique programs such as the Honor Guard and Firefighter Support Network.

- Strong historic legacy in innovation including 1st fire department-based mobile stroke unit, 1st municipal department to have automatic external defibrillators (AEDs) in municipal buildings, and implementation of field technology on the fireground.

- Establishing and administering the Emergency TeleHealth and Navigation (ETHAN) program.

- The availability of occupational medical physicals to members.

- Insurance Services Office (ISO) Class 1 status.

- Largest accredited department in the United States.
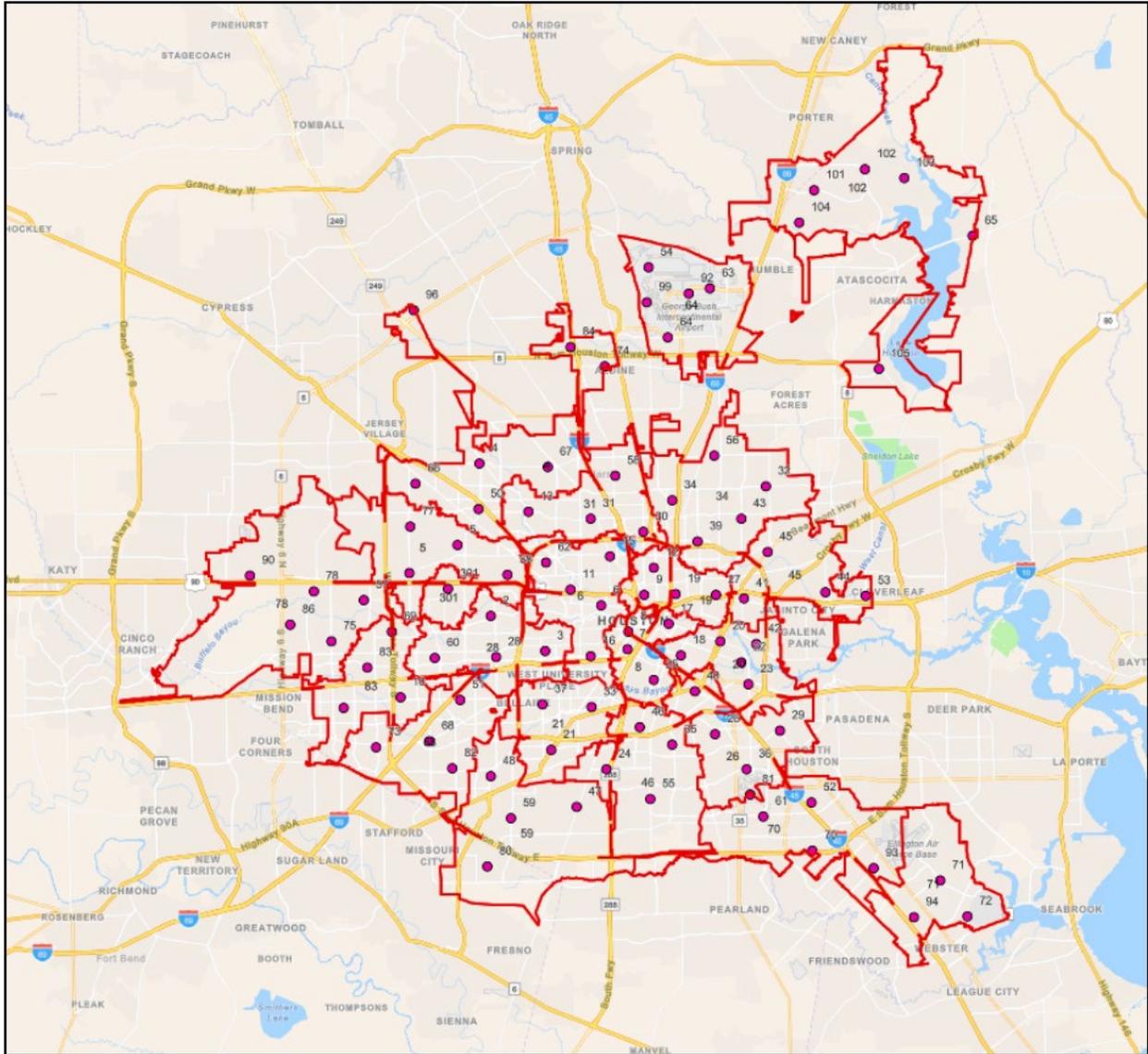
Goals & Objectives Overview

Goal 1: Build and Maintain a Quality Workforce.

Objective 1.1	Recruit and hire quality personnel.
Objective 1.2	Invest in meaningful professional development and training.
Objective 1.3	Provide quality living and work conditions.
Objective 1.4	Address occupational health and safety needs of personnel.
Objective 1.5	Maintain the professionalism of the Department.

Goal 2: Adopt a Proactive Approach to Addressing Community Risk.

Objective 2.1	Update community risk assessment/standards of cover.
Objective 2.2	Monitor emerging threats including those from technological advances, infectious disease, and hostile actors.
Objective 2.3	Maintain up-to-date emergency operations and continuity of operations plans.
Objective 2.4	Embrace a risk-based strategy in delivering public safety education programming.
Objective 2.5	Ensure the life safety of buildings in the City of Houston.
Objective 2.6	Adopt a proactive stance for addressing emergency needs at major cultural and recreational events.

Goal 3: Ensure Response Capabilities Meet Community Needs.

Objective 3.1	Configure response capabilities according to risk.
Objective 3.2	Ensure the fleet meets department needs.
Objective 3.3	Issue the necessary tools and equipment to members.
Objective 3.4	Provide a premier level of emergency medical services.
Objective 3.5	Maintain high level of proficiency in special operations.
Objective 3.6	Continuously evaluate system performance.

Goal 4: Identify Technology Solutions to Improve Effectiveness, Efficiency, and Resiliency.

Objective 4.1	Transition to an electronic system for administrative processes.
Objective 4.2	Adopt technological solutions that support planning and situational awareness.
Objective 4.2	Acquire technology with functionality and reliability in the field.

Goal 5: Develop Collaborative Relationships with Municipal and Community Partners.

Objective 5.1	Establish clear lines of communication with external stakeholders.
Objective 5.2	Pursue common goals with other City of Houston departments.
Objective 5.3	Improve interoperability and situational awareness with other public safety entities.
Objective 5.4	Partner with hospitals to improve efficiency and outcomes.
Objective 5.5	Respond to the major events of significant impact regardless of location.
Objective 5.6	Coordinate with professional associations and school districts in community risk reduction efforts.
Objective 5.7	Leverage relationships in delivering public safety messaging and education.

Best Practices and Standards

As a profession that has persisted for centuries, the fire service has developed best practices and standards that cover different aspects of its operations. For the Houston Fire Department to claim to be a world class organization, the Department should meet and exceed these standards. Commonly accepted sources of best practices and standards include the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)'s codes and standards, Center for Public Safety Excellence (CPSE)'s agency accreditation program, and Insurance Service Office (ISO)'s public protection classification (PPC) program. These best practices and standards can serve as a springboard in the development of the Houston Fire Department's strategic goals and objectives. More details on Best Practices and Standards can be found appended as *Appendix B*.

Stakeholder Feedback

The content of the Houston Fire Department strategic plan above all depends on the feedback of its stakeholders: external and internal. External stakeholders not only represent the individuals and organizations that the department serves but also potential partners in accomplishing its mission. Their perspective provides valuable insight of community needs. Internal stakeholders include every member of this department regardless of division, rank, or position. The department relies on their courage, commitment, and compassion to serve the community on an everyday basis regardless of the conditions encountered. Rather than limiting feedback only to email exchanges and surveys, the department directly contacted stakeholders and facilitated meaningful discussions. The feedback received formed the foundation of the goals, objectives, and action items summarized in this strategic plan. Additional information can be found in *Appendices C and D*.

Legacy and Pre-Existing Plans and Initiatives

Previous city-wide planning efforts such as *Resilient Houston* released in May 2020 and *Hazard Mitigation Plan Update* published in November 2023 assigned responsibilities to the Houston Fire Department. The Houston Fire Department also developed division-focused strategic plans with annual updates including those for community risk reduction, recruitment, and professional development. The annual program appraisals, as prescribed by the Center for Public Safety Excellence (CPSE) accreditation process, features discussion on upcoming goals and objectives. The capital improvement plan and the annual operating budget serve as tangible examples in reflecting the Department's priorities.

Developing a unified Houston Fire Department strategic plan involves a review of these pre-existing plans and initiatives. The previous strategic plan was also assessed to determine if its goals and objectives remain relevant. As community needs evolve, other priorities may take precedence over previously established goals and objectives that are incomplete. For more information on legacy and pre-existing plans and initiatives, see *Appendix E*.

Goal 1: BUILD AND MAINTAIN A QUALITY WORKFORCE

The foundation of the Houston Fire Department is its workforce. A quality workforce cannot be replaced by any technology or equipment. Hence, the Department must continuously remain committed to hiring, developing, and retaining quality personnel to fulfill its mission.

Objective 1.1 – Recruit and hire quality personnel.

1.1.1: Engage educational partners to identify potential applicants.

1.2.2: Identify target audiences likely to yield quality recruits.

1.1.3: Recruit candidates that reflect the communities served.

1.1.4: Provide tools for candidates to prepare for the physical ability test.

1.1.5: Review hiring standards to determine appropriateness.

1.1.6: Streamline administrative processes for staff and applicants in hiring personnel.

1.1.7: Offer competitive salaries and benefits.

Objective 1.2 – Invest in meaningful professional development and training.

1.2.1: Ensure members complete continuing education to meet state requirements.

1.2.2: Administer training appropriate to a member's roles and functions.

1.2.3: Collaborate with higher education institutions in crafting leadership development training.

1.2.4: Uphold standards in physical fitness and technical skills.

1.2.5: Acquire infrastructure, equipment, and technology that enhance training activities.

1.2.6: Integrate communications captains in emergency operations training and exercises.

1.2.7: Increase training opportunities for non-classified personnel.

1.2.8: Identify potential grant funds to support training efforts.

Objective 1.3 – Provide quality living and work conditions.

1.3.1: Seek member feedback in department administration and operations.

1.3.2: Adhere to station renovation, replacement, and expansion schedule as summarized in the Capital Improvement Plan.

1.3.3: Address facility maintenance needs in a timely manner.

1.3.4: Equip stations with the appropriate security measures.

1.3.5: Strengthen facilities from natural disaster hazards especially flooding.

1.3.6: Ensure electricity reliability at the stations and other department facilities.

1.3.7: Identify appropriate avenues in receiving community support for station living.

1.3.8: Determine supplemental funding sources to support facility needs.

Objective 1.4 – Address occupational health and safety needs of personnel.

1.4.1: Administer annual occupational medical examinations that meet and exceed state requirements.

1.4.2: Issue guidance and support in cancer prevention, cardiac health, and injury prevention.

1.4.3: Reduce environmental hazards such as poor air quality at department facilities.

1.4.4: Provide the equipment and training for members to improve their physical fitness.

1.4.5: Participate in research addressing firefighter health and wellness.

1.4.6: Evaluate workplace practices following near misses and injuries.

1.4.7: Identify strategies to reduce injuries when responding to roadway incidents.

1.4.8: Protect personnel from hostile threats and bad actors on emergency scenes.

1.4.9: Strengthen mental health programming for its members.

Objective 1.5 – Maintain the professionalism of the Department.

1.5.1: Continue compliance with legal requirements.

1.5.2: Ensure the work environment remains free of discrimination and harassment.

1.5.3: Uphold ethical standards in administrative processes and service delivery.

1.5.4: Serve as good stewards of public funds.

1.5.5: Establish key performance indicators (KPIs) that track department effectiveness and efficiency.

1.5.6: Practice procedures that ensure accurate record-keeping.

1.5.7: Monitor changes in national standards and best practices.

1.5.8: Maintain up-to-date job descriptions to ensure roles and responsibilities remain clear.

1.5.9: Update standard operating guidelines (SOGs), manuals, and forms on an established schedule.

1.5.10: Establish transparency in internal and external communications.

1.5.11: Address complaints from the community in an effective and efficient manner.

Goal 2:
ADOPT A PROACTIVE APPROACH IN ADDRESSING COMMUNITY RISK

The Houston Fire Department's responsibilities in addressing community risk begin even before an emergency arises. Prevention and mitigation efforts may not draw the major headlines but minimizing the number and severity of emergencies promotes public safety more than responding to them. Part of this process requires identifying the hazards present in the community.

Objective 2.1 – Update community risk assessment/standards of cover.

2.1.1: Adopt revised best practices established by the Center for Public Safety Excellence (CPSE) in developing the department's community risk assessment/standards of cover.

2.1.2: Engage subject matter experts to conduct in-depth analysis of community risks.

2.1.3: Review the demographic, socioeconomic, geographic, and meteorological conditions that affect community safety.

2.1.4: Revise critical task analyses and deployment strategies to meet identified risks.

2.1.5: Distribute community risk assessment data and information to the appropriate personnel.

2.1.6: Implement an efficient pre-incident fire plan program.

Objective 2.2 – Monitor emerging threats including those from technological advances, infectious disease, and hostile actors.

2.2.1: Review literature on the hazards of new and emerging technology such as lithium-ion batteries.

2.2.2: Maintain up-to-date situational awareness of hazardous materials within the service area.

2.2.3: Coordinate surveillance and mitigation measures for infectious disease with public health authority.

2.2.4: Remain vigilant in preparing for and responding to potential threats as identified by the Mayor's Office of Public Safety and Homeland Security, Houston Police Department, and other law enforcement agencies.

Objective 2.3 – Maintain up-to-date emergency operations and continuity of operations plans.

2.3.1: Confer with partner entities regarding overlapping responsibilities.

2.3.2: Involve the appropriate members that are subject matter experts in the document drafting process.

2.3.3: Administer the appropriate training on emergency operations and continuity of operations plan to members.

Objective 2.4 – Embrace a risk-based strategy in delivering public safety education programming.

2.4.1: Administer the Proactive Consumer Needs program to target high risk populations.

2.4.2: Determine risk areas in which public education has the potential in leading to positive outcomes.

2.4.3: Configure content and delivery of public safety education programming to increase effectiveness.

2.4.4: Ensure department personnel, including station personnel, obtain the appropriate continuing education to deliver public safety education programs.

2.4.5: Develop web-based resources to increase reach of public safety education initiatives.

2.4.6: Build informational material to explain the scope of department resources relative to other municipal services, including for non-emergencies.

2.4.7: Shape public education programs to meet the cultural and language needs of the community.

2.4.8: Review data collection process in tracking public education activities department-wide including at the station level.

2.4.9: Confer with peer fire departments in identifying best practices for public safety education activities.

Objective 2.5 – Ensure the life safety of buildings in the City of Houston.

2.5.1: Ensure the fire code remains current to the needs of the community.

2.5.2: Complete inspections of facilities as required by the State of Texas.

2.5.3: Inspect buildings on a risk-based schedule.

2.5.4: Adopt a collaborative approach rather than punitive stance in ensuring fire code compliance.

2.5.5: Develop publicly available digital resources to assist in fire code compliance.

2.5.6: Streamline the permitting and inspections process.

2.5.7: Identify trends in fire code violations to support public safety education efforts.

2.5.8: Reduce the number of residential homes that lack smoke alarms.

2.5.9: Facilitate efficient communication between the Life Safety Bureau and Emergency Operations Division.

2.5.10: Implement strategies to reduce the volume of false alarms.

Objective 2.6 – Adopt a proactive stance for addressing emergency needs at major cultural and recreational events.

2.6.1: Participate in planning and preparation activities for major sports events and concerts.

2.6.2: Maintain strong communication with partner entities during events.

Goal 3:
ENSURE RESPONSE CAPABILITIES MEET COMMUNITY NEEDS

The majority of the Houston Fire Department's resources remain dedicated to emergency response, maintaining a high level of readiness as emergencies may occur at any moment. Emergency response requires technical expertise and specialized equipment, and even routine incidents present risks to the well-being of both Department members and the community.

Objective 3.1 – Configure response capabilities according to risk.

3.1.1: Determine necessary capabilities for each category and level of risk.

3.1.2: Update dispatch protocols to match deployment strategy needs.

3.1.3: Position response capabilities to best meet community needs.

3.1.4: Establish emergency response goals that exceed community expectations in outcomes and service.

3.1.5: Minimize emergency scene-related injuries and fatalities for members and the community.

3.1.6: Equip first responders with the information to help connect those in need with the appropriate services for long-term support.

3.1.7: Prioritize needs during times of major disasters and crises.

3.1.8: Address high utilization of emergency resources from specific locations.

Objective 3.2 – Ensure the fleet meets department needs.

3.2.1: Adhere to the apparatus replacement schedule.

3.2.2: Design apparatus to address community needs.

3.2.3: Equip apparatus with features that protect first responder safety.

3.2.4: Conduct preventive maintenance on schedule.

3.2.5: Implement strategies to reduce apparatus collisions.

3.2.6: Repair apparatus in a timely and proficient manner.

3.2.7: Support a functional fleet maintenance facility.

3.2.8: Build a functional reserve fleet.

Objective 3.3 – Issue the necessary tools and equipment to members.

3.3.1: Procure tools and equipment that meet established standards that promote effective, efficient, and safe operations.

3.3.2: Maintain equipment and supplies necessary to support life-saving measures for emergency medical services (EMS) incidents.

3.3.3: Acquire personal protective equipment (PPE) that mitigates the risk for thermal injuries, chemical exposures, and infectious disease.

3.3.4: Minimize carcinogenic risk from personal protective equipment (PPE).

3.3.5: Equip inspectors and investigators with the appropriate safety equipment.

3.3.6: Implement practices that promote accountability and tracking of equipment conditions.

3.3.7: Administer training in operating newly introduced equipment.

3.3.8: Identify potential sources of supplemental funding including federal, state, and non-profit grants.

Objective 3.4 – Provide a premier level of emergency medical services.

3.4.1: Increase number of personnel certified as paramedics.

3.4.2: Improve the availability of transport units.

3.4.3: Prioritize positive patient outcomes.

3.4.4: Deliver services with understanding and compassion.

3.4.5: Invest in quality assurance/quality improvement efforts.

3.4.6: Expand Emergency Tele-Health and Navigation (ETHAN) program according to patient needs.

3.4.7: Partner with health care institutions in researching improvements in pre-hospital emergency care.

3.4.8: Recognize the unique challenges of mental health incidents.

Objective 3.5 – Maintain high level of proficiency in special operations.

3.5.1: Monitor levels of demand for respective special operations for the different sectors of the coverage area.

3.5.2: Remain attuned to emerging threats and best practices for each respective field of special operations.

3.5.3: Ensure emergency operations personnel maintain an awareness level of knowledge of the full scope of services offered by the Department including Special Events, Life Safety Bureau, and Arson Bureau.

3.5.4: Maintain expertise necessary for special operations to provide support for major regional, statewide, and even national events.

3.5.5: Continuing building skills for Life Safety Bureau and Arson Bureau.

Objective 3.6 – Continuously evaluate system performance.

3.6.1: Track progress in meeting key performance indicators (KPIs) as defined in the City of Houston budget.

3.6.2: Conduct data analysis of response times, operational efficiency, and incident outcomes with support of data science experts as needed.

3.6.3: Measure progress in meeting best practices and standards by National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), Center for Public Safety Excellence, Insurance Services Office, and other professional organizations.

3.6.4: Review performance relative to peer and other accredited departments.

3.6.5: Implement recommendations from peer-driven after-action reviews following major incidents.

Goal 4:
IDENTIFY TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS TO IMPROVE EFFECTIVENESS, EFFICIENCY, AND RESILIENCY

The fire service remains a profession steeped in tradition, but the tools available have continued to modernize. Once considered foreign concepts, electronic records, thermal imaging cameras, and drones are now standard parts of today's fire service. By adopting proven technology, the Houston Fire Department can better fulfill its obligation to save lives, preserve property, and serve the community.

Objective 4.1 – Transition to an electronic system for administrative processes.

4.1.1: Identify processes where analog practices have been surpassed by digital tools.

4.1.2: Consult with peer public safety entities and other City of Houston departments in assessing technology solutions.

4.1.3: Confer with Houston Information Technology System (HITS) to ensure applications are compatible and do not endanger cybersecurity.

4.1.4: Issue the appropriate software and hardware tools to complete administrative tasks.

4.1.5: Decommission obsolete systems, applications, and subscriptions.

4.1.6: Improve digital tools for interactions with the public across all divisions.

Objective 4.2 – Adopt technology solutions that support planning and situational awareness.

4.2.1: Track activity levels for all divisions with data analytics and geospatial tools.

4.2.2: Build personnel resources internally for data and geographic information systems (GIS) analysis.

4.2.3: Enable compatibility of data and systems between different divisions.

Objective 4.3 – Acquire technology with functionality and reliability in the field.

4.3.1: Implement technology that improves the dispatching and station alerting process.

4.3.2: Involve front-line personnel in the selection of technology applications.

4.3.3: Provide training for front-line personnel in the use of technology.

4.3.4: Deploy drones to support emergency operations.

4.3.5: Improve internet connectivity and communications reliability in the field.

4.3.6: Ensure the availability of information technology support services at all times.

4.3.7: Develop backup processes to mitigate the impacts of system outages.

4.3.8: Recognize the importance of cybersecurity measures in protecting critical infrastructure and sensitive data.
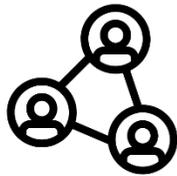
Goal 5:
DEVELOP COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH MUNICIPAL AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS

The Houston Fire Department on its own cannot keep the community safe. An ensemble of partners has a role to play. Safe, effective, and efficient operations require these partners working in concert to achieve common goals and objectives.

Objective 5.1 – Establish clear lines of communication with external stakeholders.

5.1.1: Update the website on a consistent basis.

5.1.2: Establish a regular presence at community events and meetings.

5.1.3: Address concerns raised by community organizations in a timely manner.

5.1.4: Maintain up-to-date contact information of community leaders.

Objective 5.2 – Pursue common goals with other City of Houston departments.

5.2.1: Collaborate with other municipal departments on public safety concerns.

5.2.2: Implement recommended strategies to support cybersecurity.

5.2.3: Support efforts related to hydrant maintenance and water supply needs.

5.2.4: Participate in public policy advocacy efforts with other municipal departments.

5.2.5: Complement community outreach efforts by partners.

5.2.6: Contribute expertise in addressing environmental threats such as wildland-urban interface and hazardous materials in the community.

5.2.7: Comply with standards and regulations affecting all municipal departments including procurement, human resources, and information technology.

Objective 5.3 – Improve interoperability and situational awareness with other public safety entities.

5.3.1: Define roles and responsibilities in emergency responses involving law enforcement such as motor vehicle collisions, domestic violence, and hostile events.

5.3.2: Share information related to special risks including hazardous materials to partner entities.

5.3.3: Participate in regional, state, and national fire service organization meetings and work groups.

5.3.4: Conduct multi-agency training, drills, and exercises, especially for incidents requiring cross-jurisdictional and discipline response.

5.3.5: Assess department compatibility with the capabilities of automatic and mutual aid entities.

5.3.6: Engage involved public safety entities for after-action reviews.

Objective 5.4 – Partner with hospitals to improve efficiency and outcomes.

5.4.1: Exchange data on patient wall times and identify potential improvements.

5.4.2: Build relationships with hospital emergency department physicians and staff.

5.4.3: Receive information on patient outcomes to improve clinical practices.

Objective 5.5 – Respond to the major events of significant impact regardless of location.

5.5.1: Sustain capabilities in equipment and skills to deploy to major disasters anywhere in the nation.

5.5.2: Adhere to established parameters on deployments such as those set by the Texas Intrastate Mutual Aid System (TIFMAS), Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM), Emergency Medical Task Force (EMTF), Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC), and National Response Framework (NRF).

5.5.3: Render assistance to jurisdictions in need in a timely and effective manner.

Objective 5.6 – Coordinate with professional associations and school districts in community risk reduction efforts.

5.6.1: Provide information on common fire code violations to community partners.

5.6.2: Deliver training to address risks unique to respective professions and environments.

5.6.3: Partner with schools in administering the Juvenile Fire Stoppers Program.

5.6.4: Receive information regarding the features of vulnerable facilities.

Objective 5.7 – Leverage relationships in delivering public safety messaging and education.

5.7.1: Identify subject matter experts in prevention and mitigation of respective community risks that are outside the Department's typical scope.

5.7.2: Share data on public education initiatives with community partners.

5.7.3: Build connections with the clientele that community partners directly serve.

5.7.4: Engage in public policy advocacy efforts with support of community partners.

5.7.5: Partner with community partners in identifying potential recruits.

5.7.6: Refer those affected by emergencies and disasters to the community partners that can support recovery efforts.

Appendix A: CPSE Strategic Plan Criteria

Criteria 3A: Strategic Planning, Goals, and Objectives

CC 3A.1   The agency has a <u>current and published strategic plan</u> that has been submitted to the authority having jurisdiction.

3A.2   The agency <u>coordinates</u> with the jurisdiction's planning component to ensure the <u>strategic plan is consistent</u> with the community master plan.

Criteria 3B: Goals and Objectives

CC 3B.1   The agency publishes current, general organizational goals and S.M.A.R.T. objectives, which use measurable elements of time, quantity and quality. These goals and objectives directly correlate to the agency's mission, vision and values and are stated in the strategic plan.

3B.2   The agency conducts an environmental scan when establishing its goals and objectives.

CC 3B.3   The agency solicits feedback and direct participation from internal and external stakeholders in the development, implementation and evaluation of the agency's goals and objectives.

3B.4   The agency uses internal input to implement and evaluate its goals and objectives and to measure progress in achieving the strategic plan.

3B.5   The governing body reviews the agency's goals and objectives and considers all budgetary and operational proposals to ensure success.

3B.6   When developing organizational values, the agency seeks input from its members and is in alignment with its community.

Criteria 3C: Implementation of Goals and Objectives

CC 3C.1   The agency identifies personnel to manage its goals and objectives and uses a defined organizational management process to track progress and results.

3C.2   The agency's personnel receive information explaining its goals and objectives.

3C.2   The agency, when necessary, identifies and engages appropriate external resources to help accomplish its goals and objectives.

Appendix B: Best Practices and Standards

National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Standards

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) develops its code and standards through a public and consensus-based process that is approved through the American National Standards Institute. Their provisions account for rapidly changing industry needs and ever-evolving technologies, and are "supported by scientific research, development, and practical experience from subject matter experts." Volunteers from manufacturers, users, labor, consumers, special experts, insurance, and enforcing authorities (government entities) have representation on these committees. NFPA standards cover a wide range of topics including technical specifications for equipment, professional qualifications for positions, and performance standards for emergency operations.

NFPA explicitly states that publication of its standards does not represent a guaranty or warranty of the accuracy of completeness of its information. Independent judgment, along with the advice of a competent professional, should determine how its standards should be applied. Hence, NFPA standards are not legally binding unless adopted by the authority having jurisdiction. The State of Texas has mandated the application of NFPA standards related to protective clothing, self-contained breathing apparatus, incident management system, personnel accountability system, and fire protection personnel operating at emergency incidents for career fire departments. Beginning on June 1, 2026, the NFPA standard related to medical physical examinations will also be compulsory. The Texas Commission on Fire Protection (TCFP) has the responsibility for ensuring compliance with these standards through biennial inspections. The Houston Fire Department has addressed issues cited by TCFP when identified.

Although not legally binding, other NFPA standards provide meaningful guidance in the operations of a fire department. These include *NFPA 1710: Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Career Fire Departments*, which specifies the minimum number of personnel needed for different types of fires and target response times. *NFPA 1020: Standard for Fire and Emergency Services Instructor, Fire Officer, and Emergency Medical Services Officer Professional Qualifications*, and its predecessor standards, provide guidance in the professional development of its personnel.

Center for Public Safety Excellence (CPSE) Agency Accreditation Program

Center for Public Safety Excellence (CPSE)'s agency accreditation program guides fire departments to be "community-oriented, data-driven, and outcome-focused." In this self-assessment process, verified through peer review, departments address over 250

performance indicators across 11 categories that encompass the full spectrum of their operations. As part of this process, CPSE also requires the development of a strategic plan as well as a community risk assessment/standards of cover (CRA/SOC) in which a department summarizes how it intends to address identified community risk.

Ten municipal fire departments in Texas hold accredited status as of August 2025 including the Houston Fire Department. Accredited for over 20 years, the Houston Fire Department completed its last review in spring 2021. As part of the peer report, the Department received 24 recommendations. The Department accepted each recommendation and continues to actively implement them. A sample of these recommendations includes the following:

- Formalize the process of disseminating data to department members.
- Develop a unified approach to strategic planning.
- Formalize its process for tracking goal progression.
- Provide formal training to fire and life safety educators.
- Provide additional offerings within the National Incident Management System course catalog to agency personnel.
- Explore additional outreach efforts that reduce fear about the entry-level physical agility test.
- Implement non-punitive annual physical exams, work performance evaluations, and fitness assessments.
- Continue to pursue technological upgrades, particularly computer-aided dispatch and unit alerting.
- Explore options for upgrading its information technology to improve its response model and meet its administrative needs.

The Houston Fire Department will be subject to the updated 10th edition of the fire and emergency service agency accreditation model for its next full review due in spring 2026. Although the model defines core competencies that all accredited departments must meet, departments should treat each performance indicator as items that can continuously be improved upon rather than as pass/fail. Performance indicators of note include the following:

CC 2C.5 The agency has <u>identified the total response time components</u> for delivery of services in each service program area and found those services consistent and reliable within the entire response area.

2D.5   Impacts of incident mitigation efforts, such as community risk reduction, public education, and community service programs, are <u>considered and assessed</u> in the monitoring process.

CC 5B.1   The public education program <u>targets specific risks, behaviors, and audiences identified</u> through incident, demographic and <u>program data analysis and the community risk assessment/standards of cover</u>.

9D.2   <u>Software systems are integrated, and policies are in place</u> addressing data governance, data accuracy, and data analysis.

9D.3   <u>A comprehensive technology plan</u> is in place to update, evaluate and procure hardware and software.

11A.6   The agency uses <u>near-miss reporting</u> to elevate the level of situational awareness in an effort <u>to teach and share lessons learned</u> from events that could have resulted in a fatality, injury, or property damage.

11A.11   The agency has <u>established procedures to ensure effective and qualified deployment</u> of an Incident Safety Officer to all risk events.

Insurance Services Office (ISO) Public Protection Classification (PPC) Program

As a strategic data analytics and technology partner to the insurance industry, Verisk Analytics administers what is commonly referred to as Insurance Services Office (ISO) Public Protection Classification (PPC) Program. The PPC Program grades the fire protection of a community on a 1 to 10 scale with 1 being the ideal score. Communities qualify to be Class 1 with a cumulative score of 90 or higher in the following criteria:

- Emergency Communications – 10 points
- Fire Department – 50 points
- Water Supply – 40 points
- Community Risk Reduction – 5.5. points
- Texas Addendum Credit – 4.26 points

The State Fire Marshal's Office provides oversight and provides approval for the scores to be published for use by insurance companies. Insurance companies may use this information as a factor in determining premiums.

In its most recent evaluation that concluded in May 2020, Houston received a Class 1 rating with a score of 100.80.

PPC Credit		
Feature	**Credit Earned**	**Available Credit**
Emergency Communications	10.00	10.00
Water Supply	39.37	40.00
Fire Department	47.16	50.00
Community Risk Reduction	5.09	5.50
Texas State Training	0.00	3.26
Texas Addendum Credit	0.00	1.00
Divergence (Difference of Water Supply and Fire Department Score)	-0.82	
Total Points	**100.80**	**109.76**

Appendix C: Outreach on Organizational Statements

Core Values: Courage, Commitment, and Compassion

The Houston Fire Department officially adopted the existing motto of *Courage, Commitment, and Compassion* as its core values during the previous strategic planning process in 2021. The motto originated in 2007 when Fire Chief Phil Boriskie was looking for a message that would remind all members of the core values and goals shared within the Houston Fire Department. Dr. David Pierrel, the Department's first psychologist, and a true champion for members' mental health and wellness, coined that phrase, which reflects why the Houston Fire Department has a long-standing tradition of being a leader in the fire service.

During strategic planning meetings, majority of department personnel expressed support for maintaining the existing core values. A common rationale in keeping the core values was that alliteration makes the statement easy to remember, but more importantly, the stated core values reflect what the job should be about. While some noted that the job will still be done regardless of the words on the apparatus, others suggest that the words serve as a good reminder of why they signed up in the first place. A general theme in discussions was that the actions must live up to the core values. Majority believe this is being expressed to the community, but these core values should also be applied within the Department. In the Department-wide strategic plan survey, more than 70.1 percent of respondents supported keeping the existing core values.
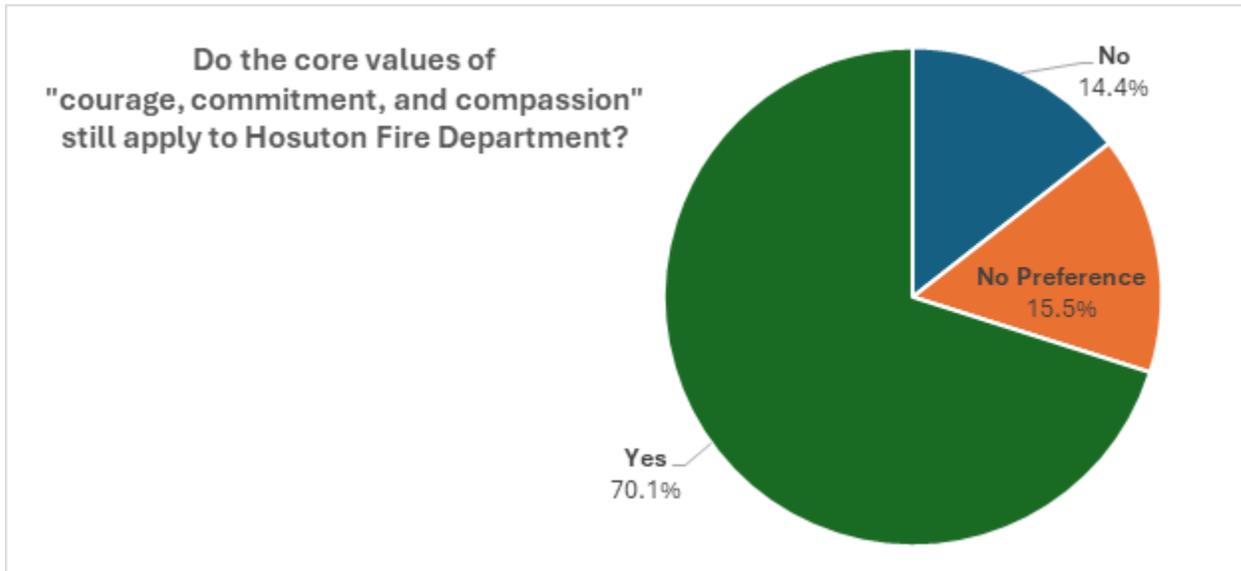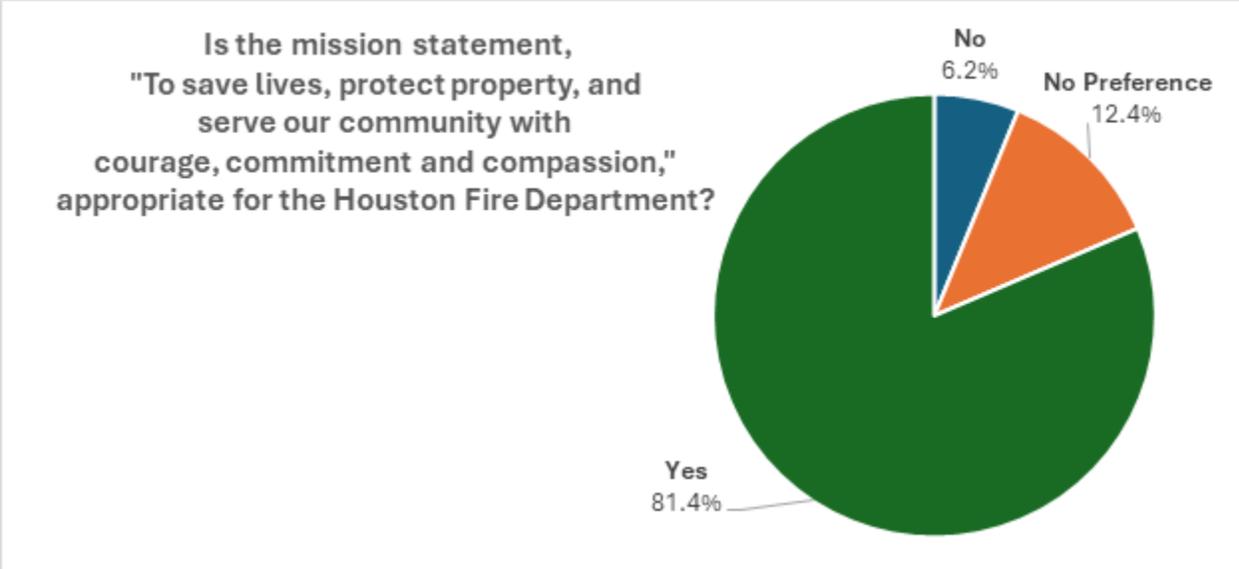

Do the core values of "courage, commitment, and compassion" still apply to Hosuton Fire Department?

- No 14.4%
- No Preference 15.5%
- Yes 70.1%

Vision Statement: The Houston Fire Department's vision is to provide world-class services that address the ever-evolving scope of hazards and risks by ensuring the safety and support of both its members and the diverse community it serves.

The Houston Fire Department adopted a new vision statement as part of the strategic planning process. Department personnel reached a near-unanimous consensus for a change. Although feedback on what changes to make significantly varied, and even conflicted, several themes emerged. For example, multiple participants in the process strongly suggested that striving to be a "world class" department should be reflected in the vision statement. This would mean "leading the nation in our field" according to one survey response. Other concepts suggested to be featured in the vision statement include focusing on the needs of the community, adopting proactive approach, assuming a leadership role in the fire service, adapting to changing needs, focusing on effectiveness and outcomes, emphasizing the importance of prevention efforts, and pursuing innovation. One comment from the Department-wide survey stated that "the Houston Fire Department should strive to become a more disciplined, efficient, and financially responsible organization — one that holds itself to the highest standards of accountability and performance at every level." The vision statement's ability to be aspirational remains dependent on actual progress in achieving it.

Mission Statement: To save lives, protect property, and serve our community with courage, commitment and compassion.

The Houston Fire Department has elected to retain its longstanding mission statement. The mission statement accurately and concisely "captures the core responsibilities of the fire service." Integration of the core values into the mission statement reenforces their importance, and any change in the core values should be reflected in the mission statement. Over 81.4 percent in the Department-wide strategic plan survey believe that the mission statement remains appropriate for the Houston Fire Department. Commentary from department personnel also indicate that the culture and actions must be oriented accordingly for the mission statement to have meaning.

Is the mission statement, "To save lives, protect property, and serve our community with courage, commitment and compassion," appropriate for the Houston Fire Department?

No 6.2%
No Preference 12.4%
Yes 81.4%

Some that support a change in the mission statement suggest that the Department needs a fresh start. Others recommend including language that stresses the Department's responsibilities to its own members. Additional comments include requests to shorten the mission statement to keep it simple. On the opposite end of the spectrum, suggestions were made to list the services provided by the Department.

The mission statement also reflects community expectations of the Houston Fire Department. The community expects the Department to keep the community safe. This would primarily be through emergency response but also through education and prevention efforts.

Appendix D: Stakeholder Feedback

External Stakeholders

<u>Participants and Process</u>

The Houston Fire Department recognizes external stakeholders as those that it serves and as potential partners in advancing its mission "to save lives, protect property, and serve our community with courage, commitment and compassion." The Department issued invitations to professional associations, charitable organizations, school districts, places of worship, and others to participate in this process. The organizations that accepted the invitation to participate in virtual and in-person meetings from October 2024 to May 2025 include the following:

- Alief Independent School District
- American Red Cross
- Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston
- Asian Chamber of Commerce
- CHI St. Luke's Health
- Channel Industries Mutual Aid
- Clear Creek Independent School District
- Center for Public Safety Excellence
- East Downtown Management District
- Fort Bend Independent School District
- Firefighters Foundation of Houston
- Greater Houston Local Emergency Planning Committee
- Greater Houston Disaster Alliance
- Hawes Hill
- HCA Healthcare
- Houston Community College
- Harris County Flood Control District
- Houston Apartment Museum
- Houston Fire Museum
- Houston Hospitality Alliance
- Houston Methodist Hospital
- Houston Restaurant Association
- Humble Independent School District
- Jewish Federation
- Local 341 Foundation
- Memorial Hermann Hospital
- Rice University
- Southeast Texas Regional Advisory Council
- Spring Branch Independent School District
- Texas Assisted Living Association
- Texas Commission on Fire Protection
- Texas Division on Emergency Management
- Texas Organization of Residential Care Homes
- Union Pacific
- University of Houston
- United States Fire Administration
- University of St. Thomas

Over 110 individuals from outside of the Houston Fire Department participated in these meetings. Along with the accreditation manager, a uniformed subject matter expert or a

member of medical direction attended these meetings. The majority of these meetings covered topics such as the Department's mission, scope of services, reputation, strengths/weaknesses, potential action items, as well as discussing potential avenues for collaboration. A survey distributed to civic clubs, which serve as neighborhood organizations for residents, mirrored the same topics discussed.

Eight mutual aid departments completed a survey in September/October 2024. Participating departments provided a profile of their department including population served, call volume, and services provided. Questions focused on assessing the current relationship with the Houston Fire Department and identifying potential opportunities to collaborate in information sharing, training, emergency operations, and administration. Departments that responded include the following:

- Atascocita Fire Department
- Community Volunteer Fire Department
- Cy-Fair Fire Department
- Cypress Creek Fire Department
- Harris County Emergency Services District #48 Fire and EMS
- Missouri City Fire Department
- Pasadena Fire Department
- Spring Fire Department

The Houston Fire Department also conducted meetings with other City of Houston municipal departments to identify potential improvements in existing relationships. Departments participating in this process include the following:

- Administration and Regulatory Affairs
- Department of Neighborhoods
- Fleet Management Division
- Houston Finance Department
- Houston Health Department
- Houston Information Technology Services
- Houston Police Department
- Human Resources Department
- Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities
- Office of Emergency Management
- Public Works

Municipal departments not listed may already have regular communications with the Houston Fire Department in place.

**Relationship with the Houston Fire Department**

Most of the community organizations participating in the strategic planning process primarily interact with the Houston Fire Department through emergency response. Business organizations and the school districts also have regular interaction

with the Department through fire inspections. The level of familiarity with the services offered by the Houston Fire Department, however, varied.

Community organizations, in general, have a positive perspective of the Houston Fire Department. Comments during meetings have included "Hard to be critical of the fire department. In last 20 years, the Houston Fire Department has been top of the curve in interactions with the business community and general public." Another organization noted that the Department has "a positive reputation compared to other services" that has been "well-earned." One hospital group commented that the Department has "inherent trust built-in with the public."   An educational institution remarked that "Houston Fire Department involvement gives [its] administration a great sense of calm." Results from the civic club survey reflect this as over 81.8 percent of respondents graded trust in Houston Fire Department as 9 or higher on a 0 to 10 scale.
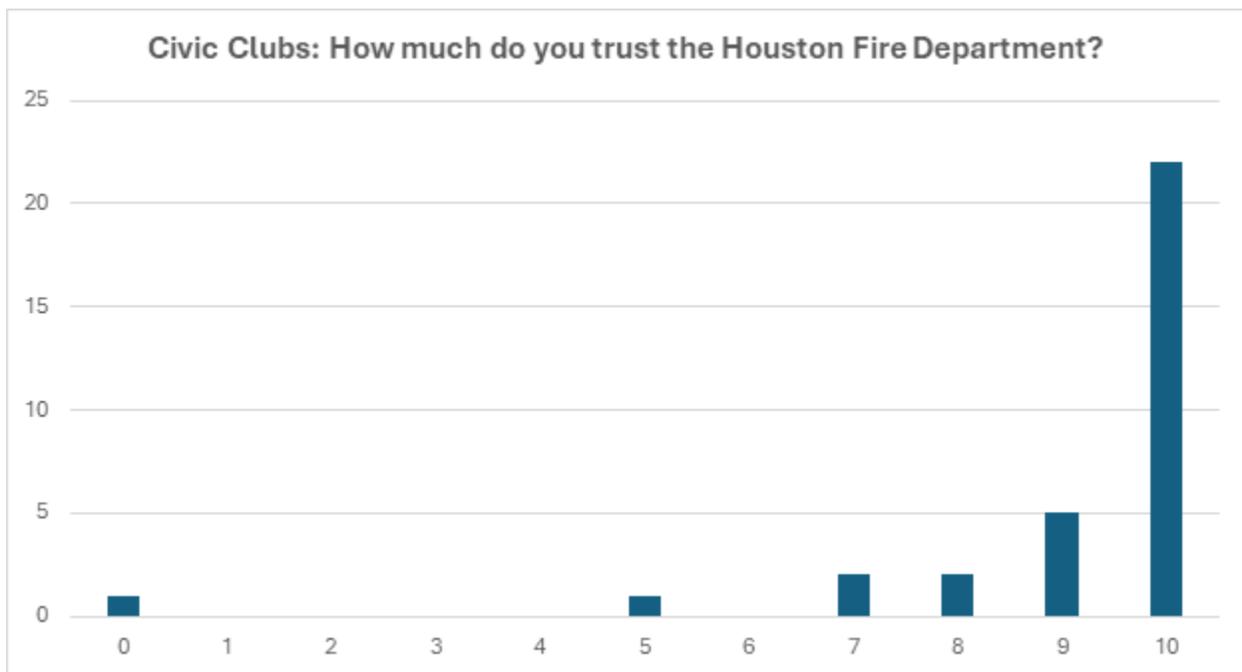
These results are a product of previous interactions respondents had with the Houston Fire Department. Excluding those answering, "Not Applicable," over 80.6 percent of respondents reported positive or very positive interactions with the Department in the same survey. One response included the comments, "When needed and called, they arrive quickly and provide quality professional services in a respectful manner." The isolated, negative responses from the civic club survey should also be mentioned. These include complaints about absence of professionalism on-scene, lack of community engagement, and "too much good 'ole boy."

Civic Clubs: How would you rate your organization's or member's previous interactions with Houston Fire Department?
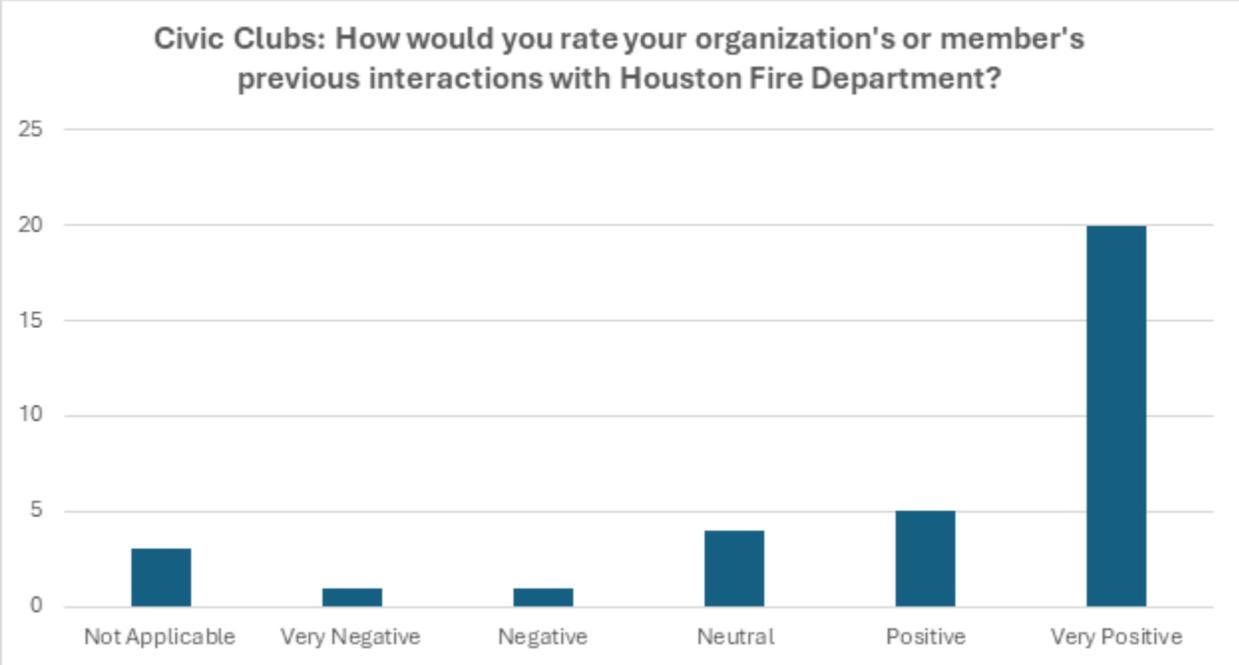
Relationships with mutual aid departments remain strong with the level of interaction varying based on the Department. Comments describing current interactions include "like greeting a good friend," "excellent standing," and "positive relationship." One department remarked that "the expectation is that the relationship is mutual and not abused." Despite these assessments, nearly all the surveyed mutual aid departments remarked that the relationship has opportunities to improve.

The Houston Fire Department relies on the services of other municipal departments within the City of Houston to operate. For example, the Human Resources Department facilitates the process of new recruits. Houston Information Technology Systems (HITS) helps the Department meet its technological needs. Public Works ensures proper water supply for fire suppression incidents. Other municipal departments complement services offered by the Houston Fire Department such as Department of Neighborhoods (DON), Houston Police Department (HPD), and Office of Emergency Management (OEM). These partner entities view their relationships with the Houston Fire Department as positive with high levels of trust, but stronger communication is desired, especially in areas with overlapping responsibilities.

Strengths/Weaknesses

Participants in this process had the opportunity to discuss perceived strengths and weaknesses of the Houston Fire Department. The list below represents a sample of answers with common top strengths/weaknesses mentioned in bold.

Strengths
- **Quality personnel**
- **Competence in Emergency Response**
- **Response Times**
- **Training**
- Willingness to problem solve
- Community involvement
- Experience
- Dedication
- Responsiveness
- Accessibility
- Professionalism
- Diversity
- Empathy
- Communication
- Engaged leadership
- Goodwill from the community
- Openness to innovation
- Positive public relations
- High level of trust from the public

Weaknesses
- **Understaffing**
- **Lack of community interaction**
- **Limited budget and resources**
- Aging Facilities
- Inconsistency in fire code enforcement
- Burnout
- Employees
- Limited emergency medical services (EMS) educational opportunities
- Lack of safe access to roadways
- Constant demands for more benefits
- Inefficient delivery of emergency services
- Communication
- Attitude in non-life-threatening incidents
- Employee retention
- Leadership

Proposed Action Items

Proposed action items by external stakeholders focused on addressing perceived weaknesses such as lack of staffing and community interaction. For the latter, regular presence at meetings of respective organizations is requested. Sustained communication emerged as a common theme of what external stakeholders want from the Houston Fire Department. Other participants encourage the Department to continue its focus on delivering emergency services with quick response times.

Stakeholders within different categories shared common responses. For example, the school districts encourage additional information sharing, walk-throughs of campuses, and venue-specific training exercises. With a common interest in improving patient care, the hospital systems support increased levels of data sharing regarding patient outcomes. Organizations that represent different demographic groups request that the Department be more aware of culturally specific needs. In addition, external stakeholders identified possibilities for collaboration such as providing training

opportunities, leveraging resources for public education campaigns, and conducting joint research.

Internal Stakeholders

<u>Participants and Process</u>

Feedback from its own personnel serves a critical role in the development of the Houston Fire Department. Internal stakeholders have direct knowledge of the needs of the Department and community. More importantly, the Houston Fire Department would not function without its members that exhibit courage, commitment, and compassion.

Starting in December 2024, the following divisions and program areas had an opportunity to participate in in-person meetings:

- Aircraft Rescue and Fighting (ARFF)
- Arson Bureau
- Emergency Medical Services (EMS)
- Firefighter Support Network (FSN)
- Fleet Liaison/Apparatus Design and Construction
- Hazardous Materials Response Team (HMRT)
- Health and Safety
- Honor Guard
- Life Safety Bureau
- Office of Emergency Communications (OEC)
- Professional Development
- Recruiting
- Special Events
- Tactical Deployment Division
- Technical Rescue

Topics during these meetings include the Department's core values, mission, vision, services, challenges, strengths/weaknesses, and priority action items. Discussion would then shift to a group-specific perspective. Participants would also identify need and potential action items in the following areas: organizational/administrative, personnel/staffing, facilities, vehicles/fleet, equipment, human resources, training, information technology, and health and safety.

Along with leads from each group, rank-and-file personnel had an opportunity to participate. Where applicable, each shift had a meeting scheduled. These meetings helped the Department fulfill requirements for annual appraisals in the Center for Public Safety Excellence (CPSE) agency accreditation process. For select groups, surveys were also distributed to not only expand the reach of this process but also to provide anonymity.

In May/June 2025, meetings were held at a station-level with a similar format. Over 30 stations across each shift and quadrant participated. Addressing issues raised during

these meetings did not wait for the conclusion of the strategic planning process. Due to responses to emergency incidents, not all members at each station had an opportunity to engage in the process without interruption. In-person meetings only covered a fraction of the total members of the Department. Hence, a department-wide survey was issued in July 2025 in which 99 responses were received.

<u>Strengths/Weaknesses</u>

According to its own personnel, the Houston Fire Department has the following strengths and weaknesses with common top responses in bold:

Strengths	Weaknesses
• **Members**	• **Funding limitations**
• **Experience**	• **Limited staffing**
• **Resilience**	• **Condition of apparatus**
• **Expertise**	• **Limited number of transport units**
• **Commitment to the job**	• **Aging infrastructure**
• **Emergency response capabilities**	• **Excessive call demands**
• Grit and scrappiness	• Maintaining professional standards and competency
• Being in a service-oriented profession	• Internal communications
• Knowledge	• Training opportunities especially for professional development
• Size and scope of the Department	• Inefficient dispatch strategies
• Resourcefulness	• Lack of organizational focus on emergency medical services
• Refusing to give up	• Sharing centralized support services with other municipal departments
• Pride in the job	• Obsolete technology
• Strong support from the community	• Excessive politics
• Current leadership	• Compassion fatigue
• Listening to personnel in the field	• Morale
• Adaptability	• Aggressive tactics
• Diversity of membership	
• Tradition	
• Community interaction	
• Aggressive tactics	

Participants noted the strong interconnectivity between the Department's strengths and weaknesses.

Proposed Action Items

The predominant answer for top priority action item was to improve staffing. This would entail focusing efforts on recruiting and retention. Competitive pay and benefits would be needed, especially as other departments also have a need for additional firefighters. Other proposed action items include expanding emergency medical services (EMS) transport capabilities to reduce the pressures the system currently faces. Reviewing dispatch strategies was proposed as a means to better allocate resources. Training was also another point of emphasis during stakeholder meetings and in surveys. Improving station conditions ranked behind these priorities but still had importance amongst the Department's membership. In addition, a sizable number of participants in the process proposed increasing the resources dedicated to the health and safety of members.

Appendix E: Legacy and Pre-Existing Plans and Initiatives

City-Wide Plans

Resilient Houston (2020)
- Build community through preparedness and disaster literacy.
- Advance and modernize building codes and standards with a minimum five-year update frequency for building codes.
- Prepare for hostile threat emergencies.
- Improve hazardous materials management.
- Improve regional response to and enforcement of environmental emergencies.
- Fortify Greater Houston's lifelines and supply chains.

Hazard Mitigation Plan (2023)
- Acquire and install generators with hard wired quick connections at all critical facilities and infrastructure.
- Promote and incorporate community health rooms in fire stations.
- Implementing an education and awareness campaign to educate residents and businesses of hazards that threaten the area and mitigation measures they can take to reduce risk.
- Relocating fire stations from the flood plain. Harden/retrofit critical facilities to hazard resistant levels.
- Assessing wildland-urban interface to determine areas where mitigation plans are needed.

Division Specific Plans

Community Risk Reduction (2021)
- Initiative 1 – Reduction in the number of emergency calls for service
  - Goal 1A: Identify EMS Super-utilizers and develop solutions to meet their needs.
- Initiative 2 – Create a City and HFD Cultural Shift to support CRR primacy
  - Goal 2A: Develop and implement training on the benefits of CRR.
  - Goal 2B: Partner with existing community programs to shift the focus to support CRR.
- Initiative 3 – Building CRR Community
  - Goal 3A: Design a multi-lingual community-based emergency response educational program that prepares citizens for accurate catastrophic events.

Classified Recruiting (2024)
- Increase current diversity.
- Maintain and increase partnerships with diverse entities.
- Increase awareness to women and other underrepresented candidates.
- Continue partnerships with military.

- Partner with agencies in targeted communities to increase awareness of the fire service.
- Increase social networking and social media presence.
- Evaluate best recruiting practices in the industry.

Professional Development (2025)
- Research available funding sources and apply for and obtain future grants.
- Continue to improve the Officer Development Program.
- Continue in bringing back our clients to the Regional Training Division.
- Holding District Training Officer (DTO) meetings at least once a year.
- Design and implement a rank specific continuing education and career advancement program.
- Complete the infrastructure and training prop renovations/additions.
- Continue to support training for the Active Threat and Violent Response program.
- The return of bi-annual training will help solidify a training schedule that will incorporate EMS, Human Resources, Active Shooter, and Suppression training.

Annual Appraisals (2024)

- Improve station living conditions and storage areas.
- Enhance technology capabilities and interoperability.
- Update performance time goals for emergency responses.
- Increase staffing.
- Build up reserve fleet of transport units.
- Emphasize clean personal protective equipment practices.
- Develop strategies to modernize health and safety records management.
- Continue engagement with community groups.
- Strengthen relations with other city departments.
- Maintain up-to-date website and social media pages.