

**SOUTH METRO FIRE RESCUE FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT**

**RESOLUTION NO. 2026-03**

**A RESOLUTION ADOPTING THE SOUTH METRO FIRE RESCUE  
2026 STRATEGIC PLAN**

WHEREAS, South Metro Fire Rescue Fire Protection District (“District”) is a quasi-municipal corporation and political subdivision of the State of Colorado and a duly organized and existing special district pursuant to Title 32, Article 1, Colorado Revised Statutes; and

WHEREAS, Section 32-1-1001(1)(m), C.R.S. authorizes the District to adopt, amend, and enforce bylaws and rules and regulations not in conflict with the constitution and the laws of the state for carrying on the business, objects, and affairs of the District and its Board of Directors; and

WHEREAS, by Resolution No. 2020-15 the District adopted the 2021-2025 Strategic Plan; and

WHEREAS, the District has been granted accreditation through the Center for Public Safety Excellence (“CPSE”); and

WHEREAS, maintaining an up-to-date Strategic Plan is a critical element of retaining accreditation; and

WHEREAS, the District has conducted a process to update the Strategic Plan through extensive organizational and community guidance including feedback from two community surveys and stakeholder feedback collected during 2025’s revenue initiative, a survey of partner agencies, select partner and industry representative interviews, a survey and multiple opportunities for input from internal committees and all personnel, and overarching vision and priorities from the board of directors; and

WHEREAS, the District has determined that the adoption of an updated Strategic Plan is necessary to articulate a clear vision for the community and the roadmap to move toward that vision.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE SOUTH METRO FIRE RESCUE FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT AS FOLLOWS:**

1. **Adoption of Strategic Plan.** The Board hereby adopts the 2026 Strategic Plan attached hereto as Exhibit A.

2. **Guidance Policy; No Third party Liability.** The Strategic Plan constitutes a guidance policy regarding future service recommendations, for use by the Board in its sole discretion regarding planning, development and operation of the District's resources, and does not establish absolute requirements. The Strategic Plan does not create any duty by the District to meet such goals or objectives. The Strategic Plan shall not be deemed to give rise to any claim or cause of action by any officer, employee, volunteer or other personnel or official of the District, or any other person or entity. Nothing herein shall be deemed to create any third-party beneficiary or give rise to any claim or cause of action. Nothing herein shall be deemed to be a waiver of the requirements, protections, procedures and limitations on liability contained in the Colorado Governmental Immunity Act, Article 10, Title 24, C.R.S.

3. **Severability.** If any part, section, subsection, sentence, clause or phrase of this Resolution is for any reason held to be invalid, such invalidity shall not affect the validity of the remaining provisions.


4. **Effective Date.** This Resolution shall take effect and be enforced immediately upon its approval by the District Board.

ADOPTED this 23<sup>rd</sup> day of March, 2026.

SOUTH METRO FIRE RESCUE FIRE  
PROTECTION DISTRICT

By   
Jim Albee, Chair

Attest:

  
Sue Roche, Secretary



# Strategic Plan

2026



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# Message from the Fire Chief

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On behalf of our organization, I am extremely proud to share South Metro Fire Rescue's 2026-2030 Strategic Plan with our community and stakeholders. The men and women at SMFR provide world-class service to our rapidly growing communities through practical, forward-thinking, and people centered initiatives.

Our challenge as an agency has been, and will continue to be, remaining proactive and innovative while staying ahead of change and continuing to provide exceptional service through all-hazards emergency response. I am honored to serve alongside what I believe to be the most compassionate and gifted caregivers and firefighters this profession has to offer.

We save lives, protect property, and serve our community. This is our mission and sends a clear message to our residents, businesses, and visitors that above all else, we exist to make our community safer. South Metro strives for excellence in everything we do to ensure the continual pursuit of taking care of others at the highest levels possible, aided by innovation and adaptability to the changing needs of our communities.

As you will see in our Key Focus Areas, our main objectives are driven by the foundation of service excellence, community health, transparent communication, and engagement. Additionally, South Metro will look to prioritize our own organizational health, partnerships at all levels, with responsible and sustainable financial health at the forefront. We aim to reduce risk, collaborate with our local and regional service providers, as well as lead the fire service industry in best practices. The ability to deliver those services will be backed by a commitment to the mental and physical well-being of our incredible men and women, strong infrastructure, long term success, and a healthy culture of trust and transparency.

Our Strategic Plan provides a roadmap for success and represents a collective effort with input from our community, Board of Directors, our workforce, external partners, political and business leaders, and industry experts. As an agency, South Metro Fire Rescue is privileged to serve in a capacity that provides for the safety and protection of our communities through their trust in our dedicated personnel.

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**John Curtis, M.S., CFO, FSEDI**  
*Fire Chief*



# Vision

A fire service leader setting the highest standards in prevention and emergency response services, positively impacting lives with every encounter.

# Mission

We save lives, protect property, and serve our community.

## Key Focus Areas and Strategic Goals

### PRIORITY 1



### Service Delivery

- + Deliver the right resources to the right call at the right time
- + Commit to innovative approaches that improve services
- + Invest in infrastructure to enhance and support the delivery of services

### PRIORITY 2



### Financial Health

- + Responsible stewards of public funds
- + Comprehensive long range financial planning

### PRIORITY 3



### Organizational Health and Culture

- + Hire, retain, develop, and grow the right people for the long term
- + Expand on culture of caring for employees
- + Remain aware of employee challenges and opportunities

# Core Values Statement

Excellence through professionalism, accountability, compassion, and engagement.



## PRIORITY 4



### Community Health and Safety

- + Increase emergency preparedness across our communities
- + Improve the prevention of crises

## PRIORITY 5



### Partnerships

- + Be an active, engaged member of communities and organizations we serve
- + Pursue regional all hazards partnerships to reduce risk
- + Influence collaborative policymaking at the local, state, and national levels

## PRIORITY 6



### Communication and Engagement

- + Enhance trust
- + Develop strategies to make our communication more targeted and engaging
- + Ensure we create and demonstrate value in our services

# About South Metro Fire Rescue

South Metro Fire Rescue (SMFR) is dedicated to protecting and serving over 287 square miles across Arapahoe, Douglas, and Jefferson counties along the southern border of the Denver metropolitan area.

SMFR proudly serves the cities of Bow Mar, Castle Pines, Centennial, Cherry Hills Village, Columbine Valley, Foxfield, Greenwood Village, Littleton, Lone Tree, and Parker, along with portions of Aurora and Lakewood. Additionally, SMFR serves unincorporated communities such as Castle Pines Village, Highlands Ranch, The Pinery, Four Square Mile, and Louviers, as well as key transportation and business hubs, including Centennial Airport and Lockheed Martin.

SMFR serves a diverse population of 571,500 residents representing urban, suburban, and rural areas and over 160 languages spoken and is governed by a seven-member, publicly elected, board of directors. The board works with the Fire Chief to establish policies, adopt the budget, and provide the overall direction and vision of the organization. As a special district, SMFR supports its operations with critical services, including fleet maintenance, logistics, facility management, finance, information technology, and human resources.


Operating from 30 strategically located fire stations, SMFR provides all-hazards capabilities including fire suppression, emergency medical services (including advanced life support and patient transport), hazardous materials, technical rescue, aircraft rescue and firefighting, and water rescue and recovery. Community services include permitting, inspections, investigations, risk reduction, emergency management, community relations, and dispatch.




**785**  
SMFR employees



**\$290.5**  
million in property and contents saved



**67%**  
total incident volume was EMS



**78%**  
of structure fires contained to room of origin



**96%**  
compliance with 1:00 minute dispatch goal



51,407  
District calls



25%

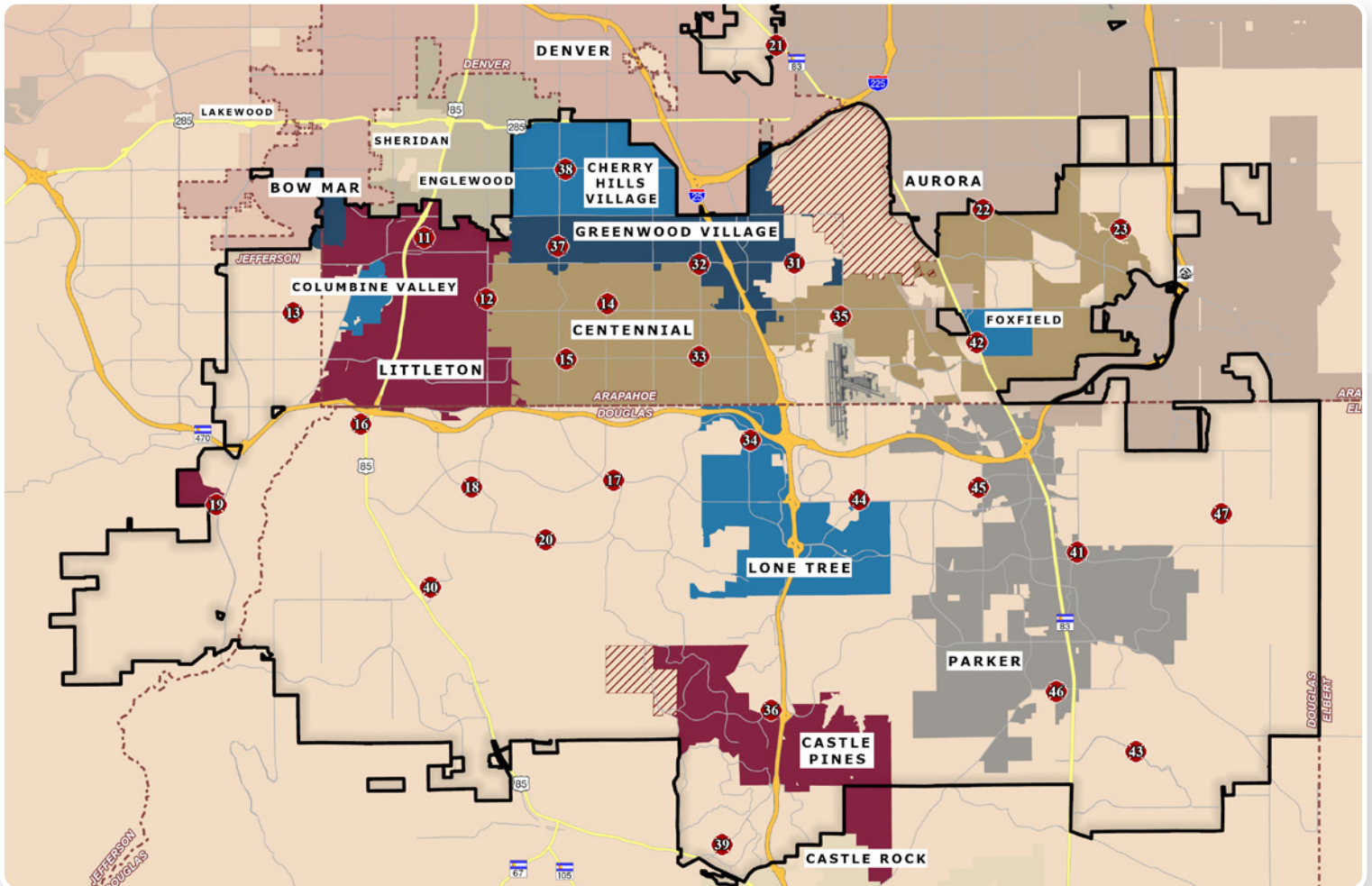
increase in emergency incidents since 2019 due to rapid growth



ISO Class 1 and Accredited



SMFR has been rated as a Class 1 fire department by the Insurance Services Organization. This is the top rating that reflects our fire suppression, training, water supply, and dispatch capabilities.





# Key Focus Areas



## KEY FOCUS AREA 1 Service Delivery

Service delivery at South Metro is a forward-thinking process that leverages industry-wide innovation and data to optimize every response. We are a customer-centered organization that remains open to new ideas and is not anchored by tradition, allowing us to adapt our resources to meet changing community needs, risks, regulations, and environmental factors. Through efficient growth and a willingness to embrace novel technologies, we ensure that our services remain the benchmark for excellence and intentional, outcome-based service.

### Strategic Goals

1. Deliver the right resources to the right call at the right time
2. Commit to innovative and efficient approaches that improve services for the community
3. Invest in infrastructure to enhance and support the delivery of services

### Outcomes

- + **Risk Reduction:** Reduce damage, property loss, death and severe injury
- + **Leadership:** Recognized innovation and leadership by other fire services
- + **Proactive:** Creative and proactive planning and approaches to service delivery
- + **Evolution:** Adapt and evolve to meet new community needs
- + **Data Informed:** Use accurate data to inform, evaluate, and improve services
- + **Resource:** Serve as a resource for other service providers



## KEY FOCUS AREA 2

### Financial Health

We maintain financial health through customer-focused, efficient, data-informed long-term planning that aligns with our strategies, major projects, and initiatives. We ensure a culture of fiscal responsibility and cost-efficiency by using best practices and constant evaluation to demonstrate our value as stewards of public funds. This disciplined approach ensures that our budget remains predictable and resilient, allowing us to meet community needs today while remaining adaptable for the future.

#### Strategic Goals

1. Responsible stewards of public funds
2. Comprehensive long-range financial planning

#### Outcomes

- + **Sustainability:** Continue to meet the needs of our growing community
- + **Infrastructure:** New, improved, and well-maintained infrastructure; including technology
- + **Strong Financial Status:** Responsible consideration if securing debt; and revenue sustainability for long range plans
- + **Reputation:** Top-notch reputation and trust from community and partners





### KEY FOCUS AREA 3

## Organizational Health and Culture

We take care of our people so that they can take care of our community. We are committed to being an employer of choice by cultivating a culture of trust, psychological safety, and holistic wellness encompassing the fiscal, mental, and physical health of our team. We foster an environment where accountability, shared values and mission-focus lead to long-term stability and employee loyalty.

### Strategic Goals

1. Hire, retain, develop and grow the right people for the long term
2. Expand culture of caring for employees
3. Remain aware of employee challenges and opportunities

### Outcomes

- + **Health and Physical Safety:** Fewer on-the-job injuries with cost-effective safety measures
- + **Mental Health and Well-being:** Increased access to mental health resources, people feel supported by the organization at all levels
- + **Strategic Workforce Management:** Succession planning, talent attraction, increased retention
- + **Engagement and Growth:** Increased job satisfaction, more opportunities for professional growth, training, and experience
- + **Service and Innovation Culture:** Service innovation that is not inhibited by tradition





#### KEY FOCUS AREA 4

### Community Health & Safety

We are dedicated to saving lives and protecting property with a flexible approach to meeting the needs of our community, understanding that safety is not only calling 911. Through a risk-based approach rooted in data, we prioritize prevention, mitigation, and alternative response models to address both physical and mental health needs. By fostering buy-in, communicating, and educating, we empower our community to take personal responsibility, creating a resilient environment to live, work, learn and play where resources are accessible and risks are identified before they become emergencies.

#### Strategic Goals

1. Increase emergency preparedness across our communities
2. Improve the prevention and outcome of crises

#### Outcomes

- + **Community Satisfaction:** Customer service that results in trust and resilience
- + **Risk Reduction:** Use a holistic approach of education, preparedness, prevention, mitigation, response and recovery resulting in the reduction of reliance on the 911 system
- + **Safety:** More lives saved, lower risk of incidents
- + **Reputation:** Strong positive reputation for our operational and business services



## KEY FOCUS AREA 5

### Partnerships

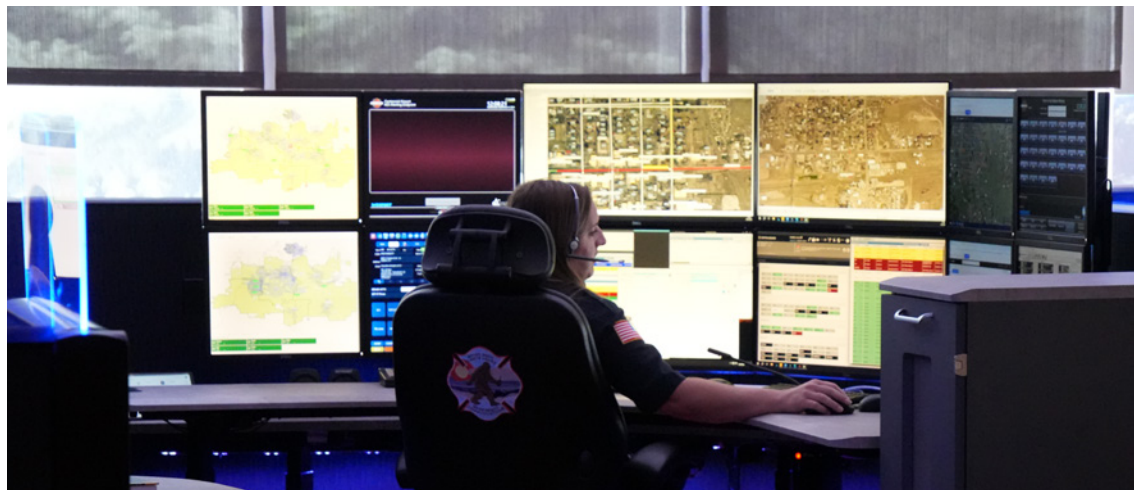
Partnerships at South Metro mean being a trusted resource and a proactive collaborator with a diverse network of partners from local neighborhoods to public, private and non profit organizations and service providers. By aligning with shared goals and our regional stakeholders, we serve as leaders to bridge gaps, solve complex problems and set shared standards for a safer community. Our commitment to these relationships allows us to leverage regional expertise and collective action to achieve outcomes that no single organization could reach alone.

#### Strategic Goals

1. Be an active, engaged member of the communities and organizations we serve
2. Pursue regional partnerships to reduce risk
3. Influence collaborative policymaking at the local, state and national levels

#### Outcomes

- + **Relationships:** Positive working relationships with all our partners
- + **Board Engagement:** Board engagement, leadership and support of strategic plan
- + **Alignment of Goals and Roles:** Aligned incentives; clear roles with partners sharing the same goals
- + **Education:** Informed partners and community stakeholders
- + **Satisfaction:** Increased satisfaction with services
- + **Presence and Engagement:** Regular communication with our partners and integration with other resources





## KEY FOCUS AREA 6

# Communication and Engagement

We practice proactive and intentional communication that builds trust through honesty, consistency, and two-way listening. By remaining approachable and receptive to both our internal team and our external community, we deliver prioritized, multifaceted messages that are clear, concise, and relevant to our diverse audiences. We ensure our communication is not only educational and timely but also innovative, interesting, and adds context for everyone we serve.

### Strategic Goals

1. Enhance trust
2. Develop strategies to make our communication more targeted and engaging
3. Ensure we create and demonstrate value in our services

### Outcomes

- + **Broad and Reciprocal Engagement:** Our workforce is informed and engaged across the organization with follow up and follow through processes in place
- + **Efficiency:** Cost-effective communications that have a clear target audience
- + **Transparency:** Taxpayers are aware of how and why their funds are being allocated
- + **Trust:** Establish SMFR as a trusted partner of services, resources, and knowledge and a steward of public funds
- + **Educated Community:** Community is aware of risks and resources and is prepared with information
- + **Awareness:** Awareness and understanding of how the governance of SMFR is structured and how services are delivered

# Critical Success Factors, Strategic Advantages and Challenges

Our Critical Success Factors (CSF) are rooted in a strong relationship with the communities we serve and our Mission. Applying these factors and strategies to our work will allow us to operationalize and implement actions that will accomplish goals.



## Critical Success Factors

- + Strengthen communication channels and outreach
- + Invest in state-of-the-art technology improvements
- + Continue to develop strong relationships with community partners to leverage resources
- + Ensure fiscal transparency and accountability
- + Utilize innovative approaches
- + Focus on customer service.

During the process of creating this Strategic Plan, several strategic advantages and challenges were identified.

Strategic advantages are those strengths, opportunities and attributes that will enable South Metro Fire Rescue to be successful; challenges reflect the issues or situations that could impair our ability to achieve our Strategic Goals. All these factors were taken into consideration during our strategic planning process within the Key Focus Areas and Strategic Goals.



## Strategic Advantages

- + Supportive, engaged, and innovative community
- + Elite skilled workforce that is supported by the organization
- + Collaborative local partners
- + Commitment to innovation
- + Future thinking leadership



## Challenges

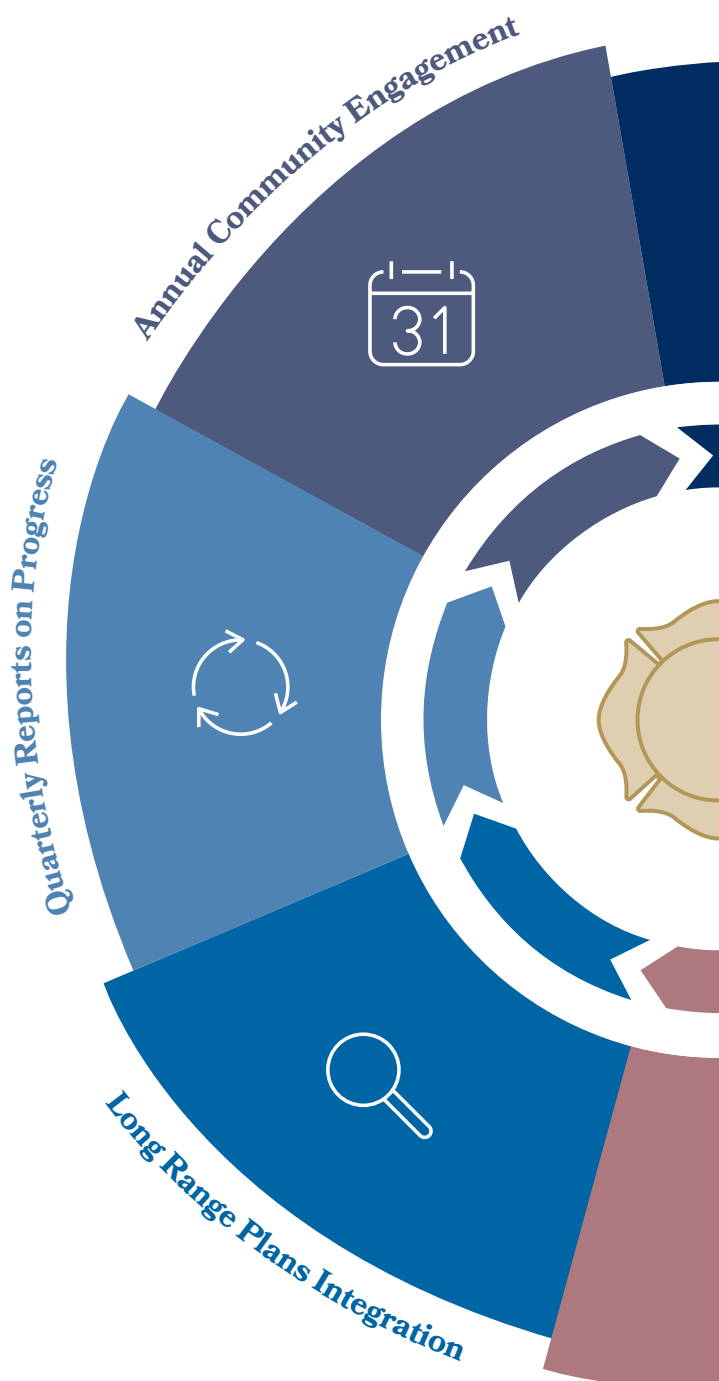
- + High rate of growth in population and density
- + Uncertain climate and weather patterns
- + Balancing competing community desires with available resources and revenue
- + Aging infrastructure and growth-related needs
- + Planning for future technology needs

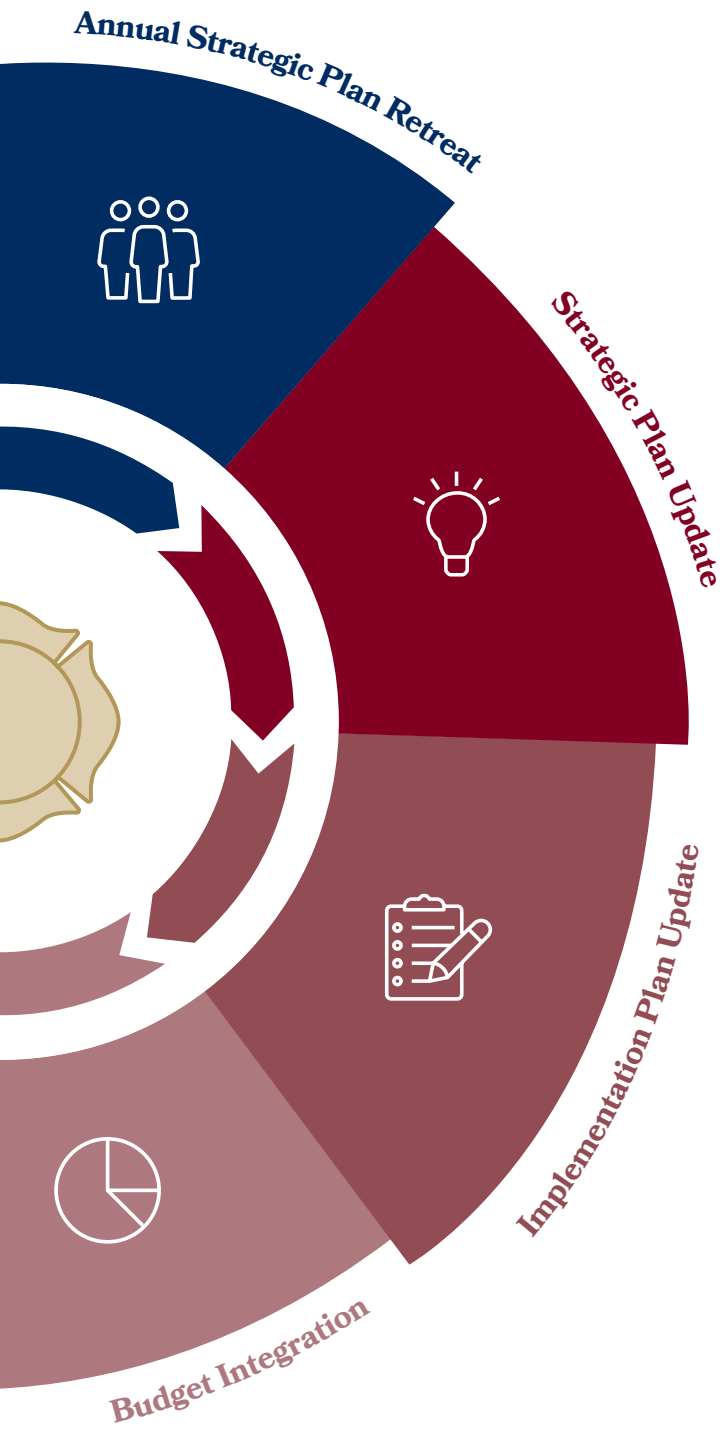
# The Path Forward

A strategic plan should never collect dust or sit on a shelf – it is a living document. Our plan is designed to be flexible, adaptable, and innovative and will be adjusted based on community feedback, changes in the economy, or unforeseen circumstances. The Board and leadership team will use the information and lessons learned from this plan to make decisions about policies, programs, and services to meet the needs of the communities we serve today and in the future.

Through integration with our other long-range plans, our budget, and our daily activities, this plan will come to life and be continuously updated and improved. A key part of our success will be the implementation plan as well as a regular reporting process to the Board. **Our approach to keeping the plan alive is shown in this graphic.**

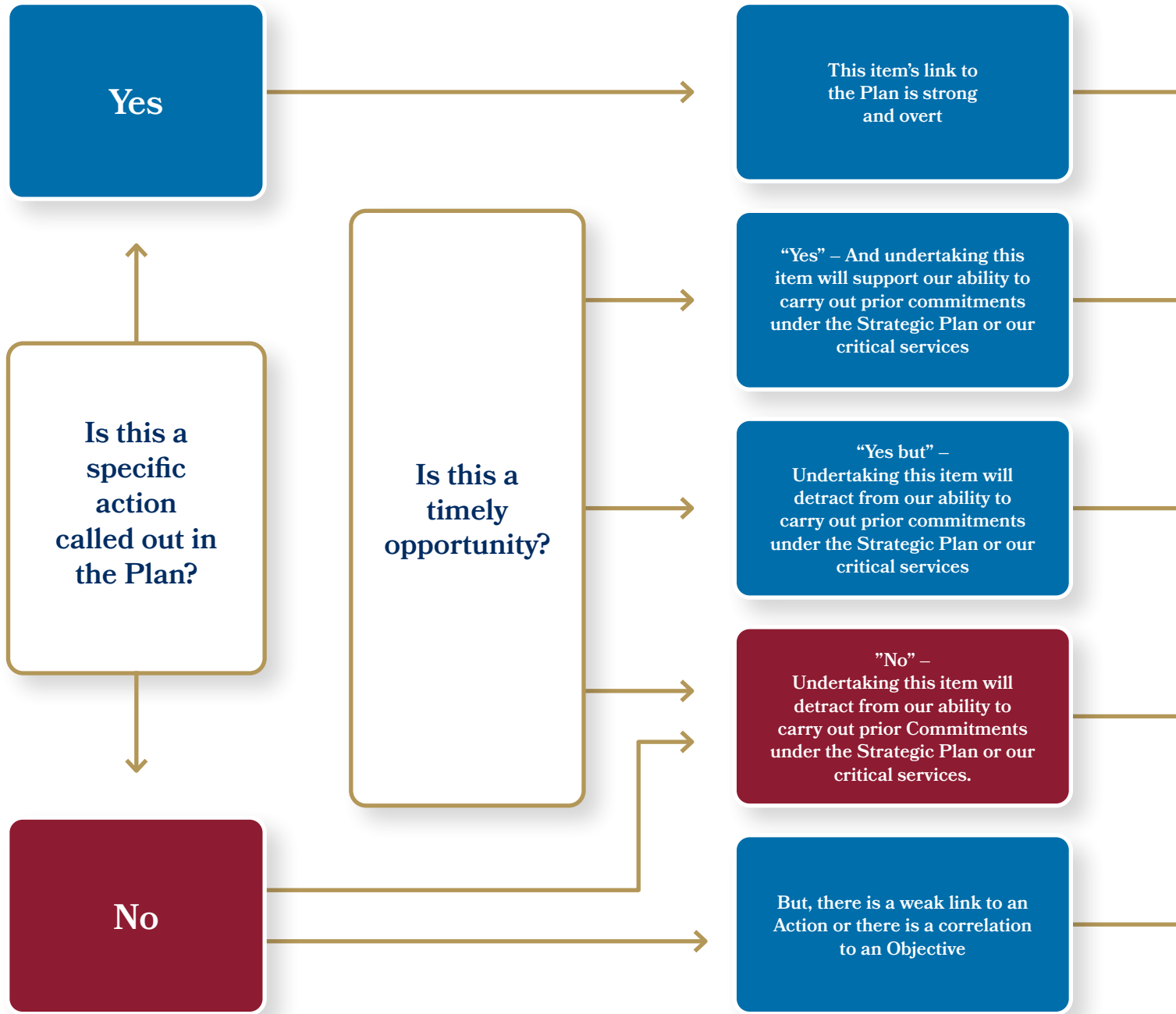
The strategic plan focuses on what is most important for our communities and the people we serve with our current services and our future plans. As a guiding tool that informs our budgets and decisions, we will use the Key Focus Areas and Strategic Goals to make informed decisions about innovative programs, services, staffing levels and commitments.

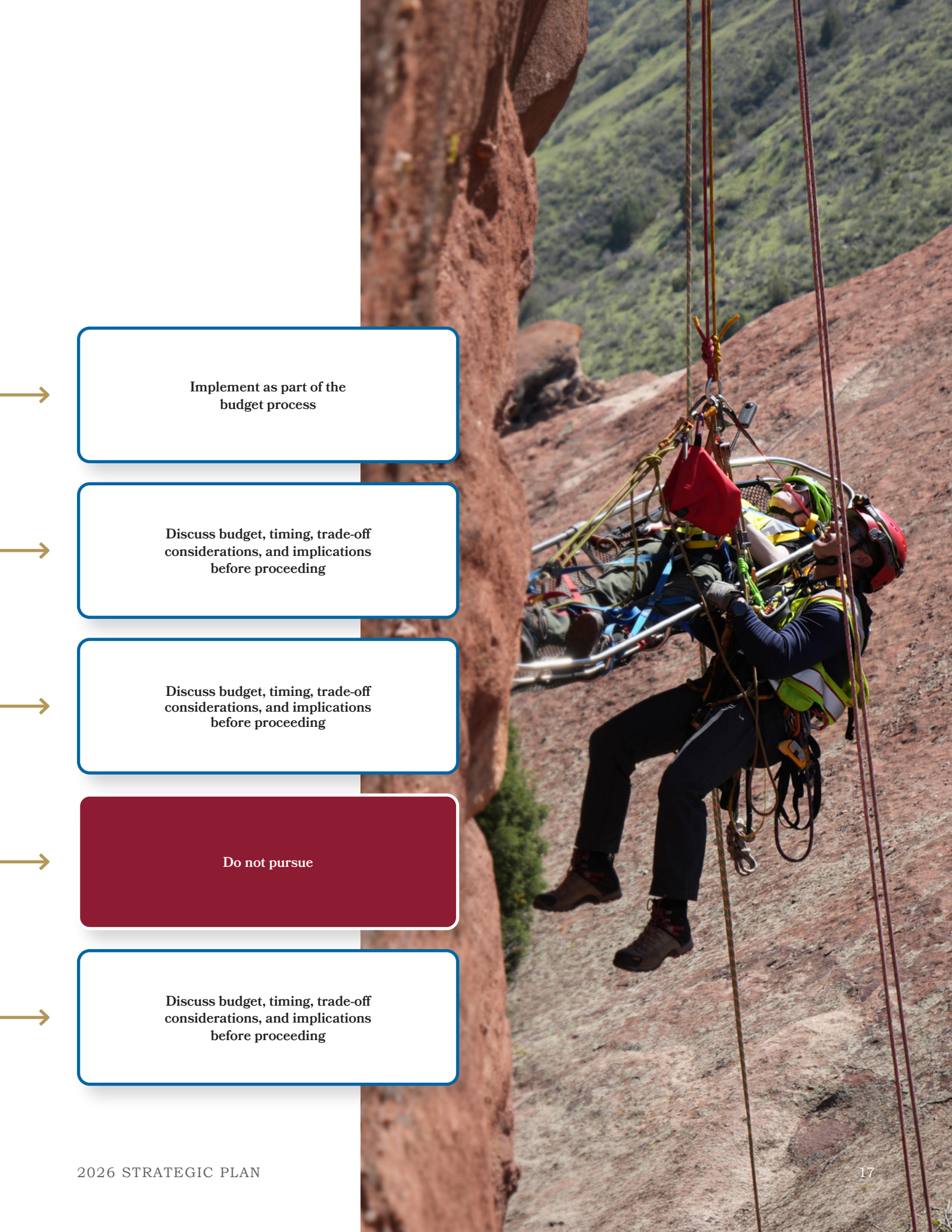




# Decision Making

As a decision-making tool, the strategic plan will clearly show when to approve a new approach, when to take time to study new information to see how it will align with our strategies, and when to make the difficult decision to not fund a new program or service that does not support our Vision for the future.





Implement as part of the budget process



Discuss budget, timing, trade-off considerations, and implications before proceeding



Discuss budget, timing, trade-off considerations, and implications before proceeding



Do not pursue



Discuss budget, timing, trade-off considerations, and implications before proceeding



[southmetro.org](http://southmetro.org)

2026  
**Strategic Plan**



**Appendices**



# List of Appendices

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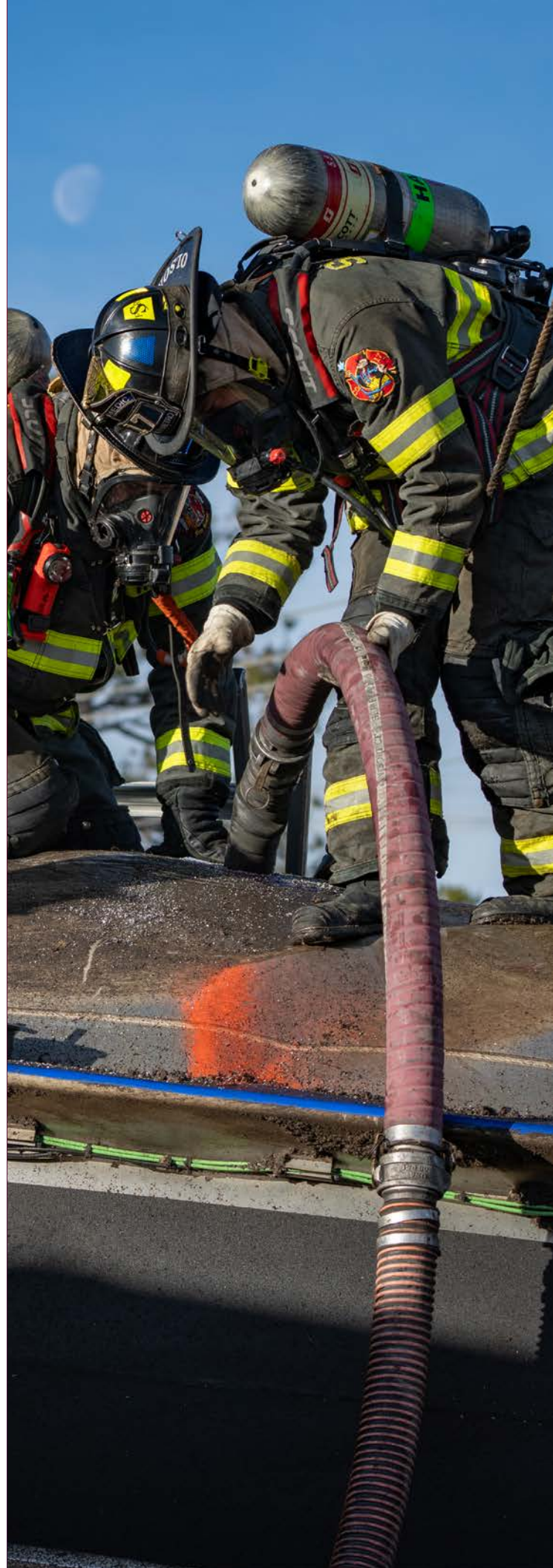
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# Appendix 1: Strategic Plan Process

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## Overview

In 2025, South Metro Fire Rescue (SMFR) embarked on updating its strategic plan to help guide the organization's direction, priorities, and investments over the coming years. The process drew on the perspectives of SMFR's employees, leadership, Board of Directors, and external partners and stakeholders. This input was the foundation for the creation of the entire strategic framework. An iterative review process ensured that the final strategic plan resonated with every level of the organization.

## Stakeholder Input

Understanding the perspectives of key stakeholders provides important context for the strategic planning process. Receiving input is essential to ensure the strategic framework is aligned with the organization's day-to-day reality and how internal and external stakeholders perceive South Metro.

As part of the strategic planning process, SMFR conducted a robust engagement process from October-December of 2025 to learn more about what a wide range of stakeholders view as critical for the organization. The engagement process included:

- + A meeting held on October 30 with the Service Group, a group of SMFR leaders who provide various services to the community and frequently interact with related partners
- + 18 1:1 interviews held with external stakeholders
- + Group interviews with members of the Steering Committee, the Strategic Planning Committee, and the Board of Directors, held on December 1
- + An employee survey sent to all South Metro personnel
- + A partner survey shared with all of South Metro's traditional external partners, including municipalities and counties in its service area
- + A review of background data shared by South Metro as well as researched by Raftelis

## From Input to Framework

Findings from the engagement process were synthesized in the Sense of Engagement Report (Attachment 3), which was shared with the Steering Committee and Strategic Planning Committee. Using these findings as a foundation, the team drafted an initial strategic framework, as well as an organizational mission and values statement. All employees were able to review the draft framework and provide comments in late December 2025.

During a strategic planning retreat in January 2026, SMFR's Board of Directors and Executive Team refined the draft strategic framework and created strategic goals and outcomes. Following the retreat, the first draft of the full strategic plan was created. During a series of meetings in February 2026, the Steering Committee, Stakeholder Committee, and all SMFR employees provided feedback on the draft. This feedback was incorporated into the final strategic plan in late February-early March 2026.

# Appendix 2: Data

## Fire marshal (2025)

- + Permits: 7,294
- + Construction inspections: 7,311
- + Business inspections: 7,398
- + Investigations: 563
- + # of businesses: 11,600

## Risk Reduction

- + 45,000 safety education interactions
- + 633 wildfire home assessments since 2021
- + PIO: 750,000 followers

## Public health program (2025)

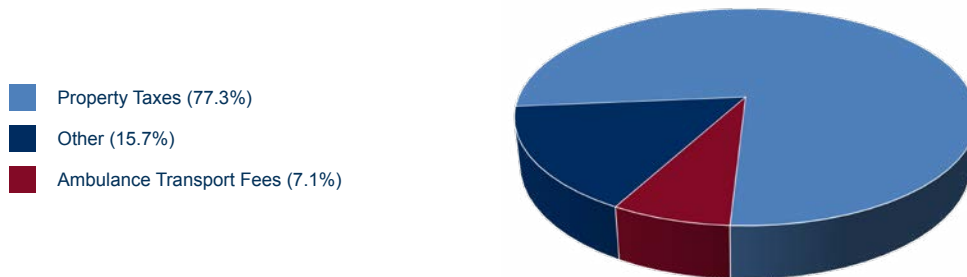
- + 1,698 referrals for aging adults, mental health/ substance abuse, and homelessness

2025 Call Volume by Type



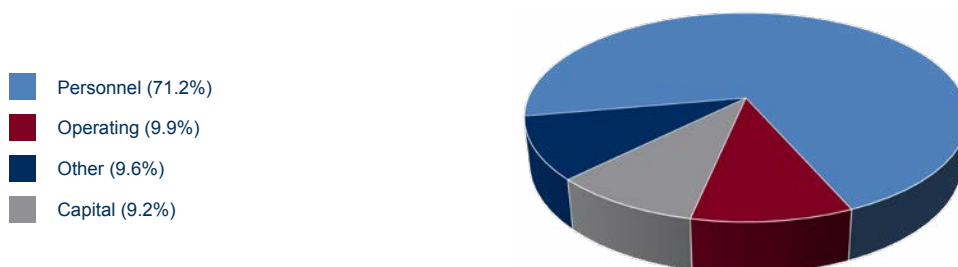
## Budget Revenues

SMFR Revenues for All Funds in 2026 Total \$264.3 Million



## Budget Expenses

SMFR Expenses for All Funds in 2026 Total \$244.1 Million



# Appendix 3: Glossary

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## Strategic Plan

A strategic plan is a working, living document that reflects the policy direction from the elected body, sets the Vision for the organization, and drives and informs an Implementation Plan which the staff will create to ensure progress and measurable results. The strategic plan should be on a review cycle: annually by the leadership team, quarterly by the implementation team, and as often as needed by finance to update the budget.

## Vision Statement

A vision statement clearly describes the long-term goals, dreams, and aspirations for the organization and community. It is a clear, ambitious statement that inspires passion and long-term change to achieve strategic goals. The Vision sets the bar high in terms of how the organization wants to be perceived by the world in the future and is a self-fulfilling prophecy. When everyone shares the vision, employees will adopt the behaviors required to make the vision a reality. The vision leads your organization - it guides your Strategic Goals, Outcomes, Adaptive Strategies and Work Plans.

Vision Statements are:

- + Clear and simple
- + Inspiring and uplifting
- + Broad
- + Built to last

They:

- + Avoid elaborate language and buzz words
- + Are easily explained by any staff or elected official
- + Motivate people to engage and support your work
- + Give hope for the future

**HELPFUL HINT:** A vision statement is a “perfect future” if everything worked out exactly as you had planned. It is not WHAT you do (that is a Mission Statement.)

## Mission Statement

A Mission Statement is a statement of purpose: a practical, tangible tool you can use to make decisions about priorities, actions, and responsibilities. A mission describes the reason why the organization exists. It converts the broad dreams and aspirations of the Vision into more specific, action-oriented terms. A mission can explain your goals in a clear and easy to understand manner. It creates focus for your work and accountability to stay on track. A mission is generally a short sentence or two that includes WHAT you do, for WHOM you do it, and HOW.

## **Fundamental Differences Between Vision and Mission Statements:**

- + The focus of the vision is the distant future (10 years, 20 years, 30 years); the outcomes of the mission are the here and now.
- + Vision gives a broader perspective of the envisioned future state; the mission details the what and how.

## **Characteristics of the Vision and Mission Statements:**

- + The vision should have a personality of its own. It should define the peculiar facet/s of the organization's long-term success and what sets it apart from the rest of the world.
- + Vision and mission statements must be unambiguous and bring clarity to the employees, residents and community.
- + The values and belief systems of the organization should be reflected in the statements.
- + The Vision statement should be challenging and motivating at the same time.

## **Core Values Statement**

Demonstrable behavioral characteristics and cultural beliefs that drive interaction and engagement. Can be defined and used as measures of behavior and “how” your organization conducts themselves on all levels.

## **Guiding Principles**

Guiding Principles are the foundational principles that never change for an organization – a core concept that forms the basis for all of the decision making. They are essential to success no matter what the goals or strategies might be. Examples usually mention financial sustainability and similar concepts.

## **Key Focus Areas**

These are the priorities, the most important issues, opportunities or trends facing your organization over the next 5 – 10 years. They are usually broad areas of service that will have the most positive impact on your community. Traditionally, they don't change over the course of several years.

## **Big Picture Outcomes**

The Outcomes are bigger picture and longer term – what is the organization trying to achieve by allocating time and resources to the Key Focus Areas? What is the end result if we are successful? The Outcomes are without specific numbers or data because they are the change/difference that happens as a result of implementing your strategic plan (policy level, organizational level, community level). Metrics will be the specific numbers or measurements of success (tactical and operational).

## **Strategic Goal**

Strategic Goals are the larger, broader, often intangible concepts that will need to be accomplished to address the Key Focus Areas and be successful in the coming years. Strategic Goals are typically longer term (3 – 5 years) in nature and have milestones along the way to measure success. Goals are big, broad statements that, when accomplished, significantly move the needle on your Key Focus Areas. If you are successful at achieving your KFA's, you will achieve your Priorities and realize your Vision.

## **SMART Objectives**

SMART Objectives are milestones along the road to achieving your bigger picture Strategic Goals. They are accomplishments that can be defined in quantifiable and measurable terms. SMART means Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Realistic and Timebound. Objectives are specific, actionable targets that need to be achieved within a smaller time frame to accomplish your Strategic Goals. SMART Objectives typically take between 1 – 3 years to complete.

## **Action Steps**

Action Steps are very specific tasks that need to be completed to achieve the SMART Objectives and Strategic Goals. They are very short term (no longer than 90 – 180 days to complete).

## **Key Performance Indicators/Metrics/Measurables**

Key Performance Indicators are measurable values that demonstrate how effectively the organization is achieving Strategic Goals and Outcomes. KPIs are used to evaluate success at reaching targets metrics in budget, strategic planning, master plans, and more. A great KPI measures not just numbers – it measures what is most important. A short example: if your desired Outcome is to increase community engagement, don't measure the number of people that attend meetings. Instead, measure how engaged they are.

## **Implementation Roadmap or Plan**

The Implementation Plan is a spreadsheet or tracking document for the strategic plan that is based on the Key Focus Areas, Strategic Goals and Outcomes. The Implementation Plan tracks several key issues: the SMART Objectives to accomplish the Goal, the Action Steps that will accomplish the SMART Objective, and the KPI's that will measure success for the Outcomes. Included will be who is responsible, specific timelines, and any resources needed to accomplish the work.

# Appendix 4: Sense of Engagement Report

## Introduction

South Metro Fire Rescue (“South Metro” or “SMFR”), is in the process of updating its strategic plan. A strategic plan creates a roadmap for an organization to achieve long-term success and guides resource allocation and decision-making to move South Metro toward its intended vision. It also helps to answer four specific questions:



To help answer these questions, Raftelis conducted a robust engagement process from October-December of 2025 to learn more about what a wide range of stakeholders view as critical for the organization. The engagement process included:

- + A meeting held on October 30 with the **Service Group**, a group of SMFR leaders who provide various services to the community and frequently interact with related partners
- + 18 **1:1 interviews** held with external stakeholders
- + Group interviews with members of the **Steering Committee**, the **Strategic Planning Committee**, and the **Board of Directors**, held on December 1
- + An **employee survey** sent to all South Metro personnel
- + A **partner survey** shared with all of South Metro’s traditional external partners, including municipalities and counties in its service area
- + A review of **background data** shared by South Metro as well as researched by Raftelis

## Document Purpose

This document summarizes the input received from these stakeholders and outlines the key themes for developing the organization’s updated strategic framework. A separate document titled “Strategic Framework” is a review of the key themes applied to the process of strategic planning, and both of these documents will be used as the foundation of conversations held at the strategic plan retreat on January 29, 2026.

# Cross-Cutting Themes

The table below summarizes themes heard across the different engagement activities. Note not all stakeholder groups were asked the same questions. The following sections of the report contain greater detail on the feedback from various stakeholder groups.

	1:1 Interviews	Group Interviews	Service Group	Employee Survey	Partner Survey
<b>Strengths</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Strong reputation</li> <li>+ Great working relationships with other agencies</li> <li>+ Rapid response; great standard services</li> <li>+ All-hazards</li> <li>+ Risk reduction, public health, education</li> <li>+ Professionalism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ People are the magic”</li> <li>+ Strong culture of supporting people (employer of choice)</li> <li>+ The team (our personnel)</li> <li>+ Communication to our stakeholders and communities</li> <li>+ Response times</li> <li>+ Innovation, willingness to try new approaches</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Great partnerships and responsive to other agencies’ needs</li> <li>+ Taking care of employees</li> <li>+ Proactive community engagement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ The people and crews</li> <li>+ Internal support (Logistics and Wellness)</li> <li>+ Great equipment</li> <li>+ Training</li> <li>+ Public support/ passage of 7A</li> <li>+ Leadership</li> <li>+ Compensation</li> <li>+ Service delivery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Strong reputation</li> <li>+ Excellent partnerships</li> <li>+ Professionalism; dedication by a highly skilled team</li> <li>+ Good community outreach and visibility</li> </ul>
<b>Challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Financial constraints; reimbursement</li> <li>+ Reliance on Fire/ EMS as a safety net</li> <li>+ Aging, growing pop.</li> <li>+ Responding to regulatory changes</li> <li>+ Maintaining culture amidst turnover</li> <li>+ Politicization of public safety</li> <li>+ Density</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Changing demographics (aging)</li> <li>+ Loss of healthcare; using 911 as a doctor</li> <li>+ Increasing density</li> <li>+ Changes in weather causing higher risk factors</li> <li>+ Revenues to match increasing need</li> <li>+ Facilities keeping up w/ growth of the organization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Wildland-urban interface (WUI)</li> <li>+ Cybersecurity</li> <li>+ Medicaid cuts and more reliance on EMS for healthcare</li> <li>+ Changing financial environment and revenue fluctuations</li> <li>+ Responding to needs of 12 unique municipalities &amp; 3 counties</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Sustaining service levels with population growth and rising costs</li> <li>+ Organization structure that is efficient and meets current needs</li> <li>+ Succession planning</li> <li>+ Recruitment and retention</li> <li>+ Aging population; more EMS demand</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Maintaining service levels amidst growing population</li> <li>+ Financial challenges</li> <li>+ Workforce and retention</li> </ul>
<b>Opportunities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Advocacy for partners</li> <li>+ Technology, incl. AI</li> <li>+ More partnerships and engagement</li> <li>+ Engaging entire organization for desired culture</li> <li>+ Imagining and training for worst-case scenarios</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Communication (internally and externally)</li> <li>+ Succession planning</li> <li>+ Technology (AI, data analysis)</li> <li>+ Evaluating delivery of service to match needs of communities</li> <li>+ Rightsizing response</li> <li>+ Investing in facilities for the future</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Strengthen mutual and automatic aid coordination</li> <li>+ Operational and political advocacy for regional partners</li> <li>+ Continue recruitment strategies to get high quality, mission-driven candidates</li> <li>+ Maintain strong financial stewardship</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Increased professional growth opportunities</li> <li>+ Funding infrastructure and new stations</li> <li>+ Increased financial discipline</li> <li>+ Focus on paramedic recruitment and retention</li> <li>+ Expand Wellness program</li> <li>+ Stay focused on culture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Continued proactive engagement and long-range planning</li> <li>+ Remaining fiscally prudent and controlling costs</li> <li>+ Considering impacts of AI on operations</li> </ul>
<b>Other Trends</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Lithium ion, electrical vehicles (EVs), data centers</li> <li>+ More local burden for emergency response</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ More medical than fire response</li> <li>+ Changes in building codes</li> <li>+ Not a trend, but fiscal responsibility/ sustainability was a common theme</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Fire suppression for EVs</li> </ul>		

# 1:1 Interviews

In collaboration with the Steering Committee, several stakeholders were identified for one-on-one interviews with Raftelis. Participants were selected based on their knowledge of fire and rescue services, their close working relationships with SMFR, as consumers of the services, and due to the depth of their insight into the future of SMFR. Raftelis conducted 18 interviews over the course of November; during these interviews, participants were asked four primary questions to better understand their perceptions of the organization and its operating environment.

## Key Themes

- + Interviewees highlighted strong working relationships and want the organization to continue its excellent, proactive communication and engagement.
- + They also anticipate increased call volume from a growing and aging population. There will be more reliance on EMS, including for behavioral health.
- + Financial challenges will continue, in part due to changes in reimbursement models. South Metro must be prepared in how to manage expected service levels as it faces more constraints.
- + SMFR has a strong reputation and is well-positioned to be a legislative advocate for other public safety and local government agencies facing shared challenges.
- + As natural turnover occurs, it will be critical to be intentional about sustaining the desired organizational culture.

### Question 1: What about the services that SMFR provides right now that you want to preserve no matter what?

- + Good working relationships and communication; interviewees feel like a partner
- + Strong individual relationships with South Metro staff working in communities
- + Rapid response, standard, mandated services
- + All-hazards capabilities
- + Helping neighbors, especially incident dispatch team
- + Risk reduction, prevention, and education
- + The Public Health program as behavioral health support becomes increasingly important
- + “Not just what they do, but how they do it” - professionalism and bedside manner

### Question 2: What will change, improve, or happen in the next 5-10 years that SMFR will have to address in order to be successful?

- + The area’s population is growing and aging
- + Increased density
- + Impacts of emerging technologies such as lithium ion, electric vehicles, and data centers
- + Financial constraints and reimbursement challenges
- + Due to this, and changes in Medicaid, Fire/EMS will likely become more of a safety net for behavioral health. More people will be “using 911 as their doctor.”
- + Emergency response models may be pushed away from FEMA and rely more on states, and in practice, local jurisdictions. Local jurisdictions may bear a greater cost burden for emergency response as well.

**Question 3: What are some of the opportunities that SMFR can leverage to be successful?**

- + Staying abreast of how to use technology and AI to help operations. However, as the service population ages, there may be hesitancy to engage with technology regarding healthcare concerns.
- + Preparing for the worst, unimaginable scenarios
- + While trust in government is low, trust in South Metro is high. The organization can leverage its strong reputation for legislative/advocacy leadership.
- + Increasing partnerships and proactive community engagement
- + Focusing internally to engage the entire organization and being mindful of desired culture

**Question 4: What are some of the challenges you see for SMFR?**

- + Heightened expectations for financial discipline as many government agencies face a challenging budgetary environment
- + Changes in reimbursement models
- + Increased politicization of public safety
- + Responding to regulatory requirements, including the discovery obligations under Rule 16 of criminal code
- + Relaxing of codes to build more density
- + As members of the Executive Team retire, how will the organization maintain its current desired culture?

## Group Interviews

On December 1, Raftelis conducted group interviews with members of the **Steering Committee**, the **Strategic Planning Committee**, and the **Board of Directors**. While different questions were asked of each group, several key themes emerged.

### Key Themes

- + **Issues/challenges:** All three groups saw challenges with the changing demographics (an aging population, aging in place); the legislative effects on the affordability of healthcare (more people without healthcare); and how the facilities and buildings of SMFR have not been able to expand at the same level as the growth in the organization and the growth in the various communities. Additionally, the changes in weather patterns that create more risk and being able to adapt the structure of service delivery to the changing needs of the community were identified as common challenges.
- + **The Value and Use of the Strategic Plan:** The responses from the Steering Committee and the Board group conversations were all focused on using the strategic plan as a working document that is used at every Board meeting to help frame and guide discussions and decisions about resource allocation. Integrating the plan into the culture of the organization through budget processes, recruiting and hiring practices, performance evaluations, and employee recognition was also mentioned. There was a strong understanding that the plan needs the full support and engagement across the full leadership spectrum to “be dirty, not dusty.” The Strategic Plan should be a clear and transparent communication tool to show the community how their money is being prioritized for the future delivery of services that they need and want.
- + **Strengths:** The common theme among all three groups could be summarized as “our people and our culture.” The specific comments focused on being an employer of choice and the various investments that the organization has made in wellness, health, training and development, and

compensation packages for the personnel. The culture (“the SMFR Way”) was also a through line of why the organization has been successful at building partnerships and relationships in the community. One additional theme was the high quality of service delivery, including response times.

## Other Notable Comments

While not shared universally across the three groups, the following topics may be important for consideration:

- + The use of outcome-based metrics
- + The strategic plan as a philosophy, not just a directional document
- + Visibility, image, branding of SMFR
- + Community risk reduction

## Service Group

The Service Group is a group of South Metro leadership whose teams provide important services to the community and regularly interact with external service providers and related partners. On October 30, the Service Group met to discuss the agency’s focus and impactful trends over the next several years.

### Question 1: Putting yourself in the service provider’s shoes, what would be the most important thing for SMFR to focus on over the next 5, 10, and 15 years?

Participants emphasized the need for proactive engagement and coordination with surrounding and partnering agencies for

- + Mutual aid
- + Legislative advocacy
- + Transparency and financial responsibility
- + Responsiveness to local needs
- + Alignment of resources, especially in response to community growth
- + Clarity on the role of SMFR

### Question 2: What trends will affect SMFR’s ability to provide services to the community?

- + **Technological:**
  - **AI** was viewed as a complex trend; one that can enhance operational efficiencies but also carries notable risks
  - **Cybersecurity** risks are ever-evolving
  - Emerging risks of **electric vehicles**, which create new fire suppression challenges
- + **Workforce:**
  - Challenges with **recruitment**, including a national shortage of firefighters and paramedics. Despite these challenges, South Metro has recently seen higher **quality candidates**.
  - SMFR remains a “**destination**” employer
- + **Political and Economic:**
  - **Legislation and regulatory changes** can create financial and service implications
  - **Financial volatility** due to property tax fluctuations, real estate trends, and increasing costs
  - South Metro must continue to respond to **changes within its partner and neighboring agencies**
- + **Operational:**
  - Due in part to changes in Medicaid, **EMS’s role is increasingly shifting**
  - **Wild-urban interface** (WUI) will continue to be an area of concern

# Employee Survey

A short online survey was sent to all SMFR employees. A total of 128 responses were received, for a response rate of 17% (769 employees as of January 1, 2025). The survey instrument can be found in Appendix A.

## **Question 1: When you think about what is going well right now for the organization, what are the top three things that come to mind?**

- + Employees have the right tools to do their job, including equipment, apparatus, and personal protective equipment (PPE)
- + Great internal support; the Wellness Program and Logistics were highlighted most frequently
- + High-quality training
- + Strong public support, as indicated by the recent passage of ballot initiative 7A
- + Top-tier service and excellent response times delivered by dedicated employees
- + Strong leadership
- + Compensation, including both pay and benefits

## **Question 2: Thinking ahead 5-10 years into the future, what are your biggest challenges for the organization?**

- + Sustaining current service levels amidst population growth and rising costs
- + Organizational structural concerns, such as becoming too “top heavy” and the current EMS structure
- + Succession planning
- + Retention and recruitment, especially for paramedics
- + Aging population and increased demand for EMS

## **Question 3: Tell us one thing you love about working for SMFR.**

- + “The people I work with” – strong dedication and personal ties to crews
- + Positively impacting the community, being mission-driven
- + Feeling supported, with excellent resources and equipment as well as the wellness program

***“My crew at my station is the only thing that matters. That is my family.”***

## **Question 4: If you were making the decision, what are the five biggest, most important priorities that you would focus on to improve the work of SMFR into the future?**

- + Infrastructure investment, including upgrading existing facilities, building new stations, and investing in apparatus
- + Financial/budget concerns, including heightened expectations for prudent stewardship and stretching resources
- + Reduce the work week for improved employee wellness
- + Enhancing training and building a training facility
- + Hiring, especially for EMS
- + Maintaining focus on being a leading Fire/EMS organization and an employer of choice

# Partner Survey

Raftelis developed a brief survey for South Metro’s external partners (such as municipalities and counties within its service area) to provide feedback. The survey was then sent by South Metro; a total of 21 responses were received. The survey instrument can be found in Appendix B.

## Question 1: What are the three most significant strengths that SMFR can leverage to be successful in the future?

Nearly all responses focused on the following strengths of South Metro:

- + Reputation for excellent partnerships
- + Professionalism and dedication, with a highly skilled team
- + Community outreach and visibility

## Question 2: What are the 3 most significant challenges that SMFR will need to address or overcome to be successful in the future?

Most responses focused on:

- + Maintaining service levels amidst continued population growth of the service area
- + Financial challenges, including rising costs for equipment and personnel, as well as long-range funding strategy
- + Workforce challenges such as retention

## Question 3: How would you rate your agency/community’s current working relationship with South Metro? 1 = needs significant improvement, 5 = very strong partnership

Average rating = 4.28



Participants were asked to describe why they chose their rating. Representative responses of favorable (ratings of 4+) responses include:

- + “...appreciated your willingness to talk to our Council earlier this year to hear its feedback about whether to request a property or sales tax increase in the fall. SMFR also acted on the feedback it received from us and other local governments related to that decision.”
- + “Outreach is regular and substantial”
- + “Communication with my community’s staff and residents on incidents, policies and events seem to be comprehensive.”

Representative responses of less favorable (ratings of  $\leq 3$ ) responses include:

- + “Less and less of a partner in our data and information administratively”
- + “We have a solid foundation due to the efforts of the Community Risk Reduction Team and South Metro Safety Foundation, but there is significant room to strengthen day-to-day collaboration and community engagement”

**Question 4: Other than items you have previously identified, are there any additional thoughts SMFR should consider as it develops its new strategic plan?**

Out of 12 responses to this question, most touched on the following themes:

- + Expressions of appreciation and remarks around “keep it up”
- + Continued proactive engagement and long-range planning
- + Remaining financially prudent and controlling costs
- + Considering how AI can impact operations

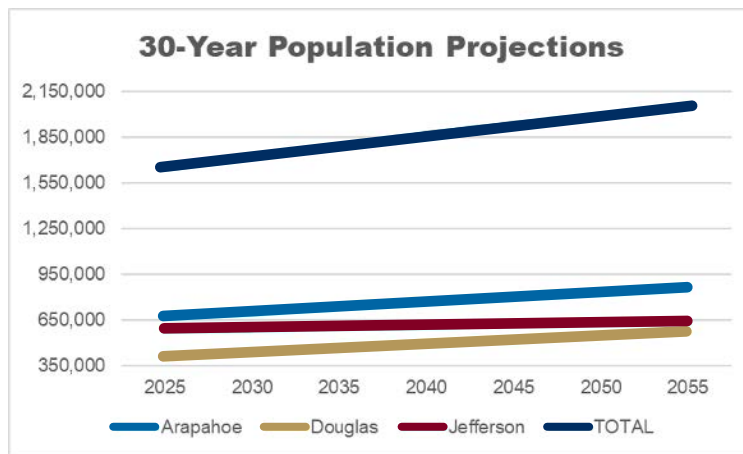
## Supporting Data and Trends

The following section includes additional information about some of the trends identified during the engagement process that South Metro should consider as it develops its strategic plan. Select relevant data points have been included to provide additional context.

### Growing, Aging Population

The population of the counties in South Metro’s service area are expected to grow by about 24.4% over the next 30 years. Note these estimates do not specify those “in district.”

Source = [Colorado State Demography Office](#)



	2025	2030	2035	2040	2045	2050	2055	% Growth
<b>Arapahoe</b>	667,885	692,570	728,427	763,856	794,906	823,938	851,589	27.5%
<b>Douglas</b>	401,211	436,921	470,833	501,601	528,255	550,552	568,781	41.8%
<b>Jefferson</b>	577,837	585,095	597,244	608,028	617,308	623,814	628,907	8.8%
<b>TOTAL</b>	1,646,933	1,714,586	1,796,504	1,873,485	1,940,469	1,998,304	2,049,277	<b>24.4%</b>

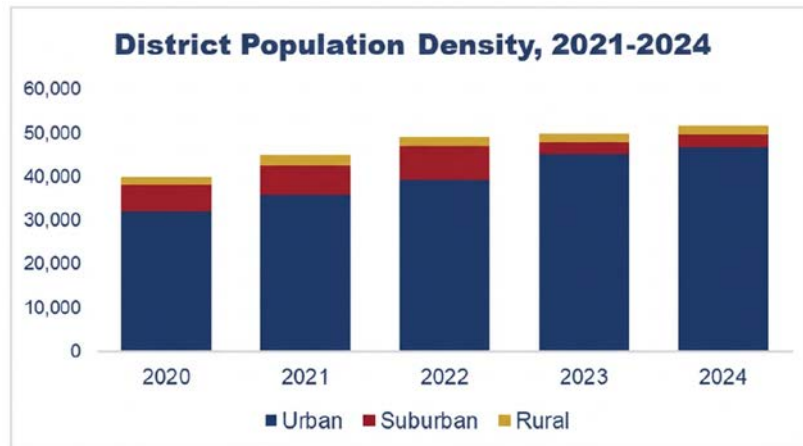
The median age is also expected to increase, especially in Douglas County.

Source = [Colorado State Demography Office](#)

	2025	2030	2035	2040	2045	2050	2055	% Increase
<b>Arapahoe</b>	38.4	39.3	40.0	40.4	40.8	41.2	41.7	<b>9%</b>
<b>Douglas</b>	39.1	40.5	41.7	42.8	43.8	44.8	45.7	<b>17%</b>
<b>Jefferson</b>	41.7	42.6	43.2	43.7	43.9	44.1	44.4	<b>6%</b>

## Population density is increasing.

Source = South Metro Fire Rescue 2025 Fact Sheet



Other key population trends mentioned by participants in the engagement process include:

- + Mental health and substance use
- + Unhoused population
- + Increasing density and high-rise apartments

## Political and Regulatory

Participants highlighted a few key political and regulatory trends, including:

- + A decreasing level of support (from the federal and state government, and from a budgetary perspective) for health and human services.
- + As FEMA faces an uncertain future, a [Review Council](#) on the agency is expected to release a report in mid-December that will outline potential recommendations for the national emergency response model.
- + EMS agencies will be impacted as there are changes in Medicare coverage and as more people lose health insurance.
- + The built environment is changing, with the State of Colorado updating regulations regarding density, as well as individual communities changing their community development design regulations.

## Workforce

Workforce trends mentioned by engagement participants include:

- + The fact that new hires, broadly speaking, may not be as committed to a career and may not find the same value in staying with one organization for a long time.
- + Succession planning is crucial as many executive level team members approach retirement.
- + Maintaining and enhancing the current culture is critical to future success, will require commitment and focus.
- + Increased challenges with paramedic burnout and retention.
- + There are some concerns about the organizational structure. Data from the 2024 Employee Survey conducted by the National Business Research Institute, shared by SMFR as background material, shows that 70% of respondents disagreed with the statement “The new EMS rank structure integrates well into the chain of command.” This sentiment echoes some comments from the Employee Survey conducted for this report.

## **Technology**

Key technological trends mentioned by engagement participants include:

- + Telehealth
- + Response to incidents with technology, such as autonomous vehicles, robots, and drones
- + Increase in data to drive decisions
- + Increased fire suppression challenges for EVs, lithium ion batteries, data centers, and other emerging technologies.

## **Customer Expectations**

Customer (and partner) expectations noted include:

- + Strengthened human connection with South Metro’s team – “We know them personally.”
- + A sense of feeling like they are a part of our community
- + A desire to be partners in planning

## **Additional Risk Factors**

Additionally, participants highlighted increased risk factors such as climate and weather issues, as well as wildfire planning and response.

# Appendix 5:

## List of Reference Documents

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**The following documents and data informed the development of this plan (listed alphabetically):**

- + 2021-2025 and 2016-2020 Strategic Plans
- + 2021 Community Risk Assessment – Standards of Cover
- + 2022 SMFR Fire Protection District Service Plan
- + 2024 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report
- + 2024 Annual Response Report
- + 2024 Community Services Division Community Risk Reduction Strategic Plan
- + 2024 Division Appraisals for ARFF, Communications, CRR  
Investigations, Dispatch, Dive, Emergency Management, EMS, Fire  
Suppression, Hazmat, Public Health, SWAT, Tech Rescue, Training, Wellness, and Wildland
- + 2024-2026 Emergency Communications 3-Year Plan
- + 2024-2026 Fleet Services Strategic Plan
- + 2025 Budget Report
- + 2025 Fact Sheet
- + 21R-02 Accreditation Report
- + ESRI Community Profile data
- + Other organizational data including HR information and working agreement with Local 2086
- + Polling data and research related to Ballot Measure 7A
- + Recommendations from May 2025 Organizational Assessment conducted by Firefighter  
Inspiration Readiness & Education



[southmetro.org](http://southmetro.org)