

City of Patterson

Fire Department

Summary [REDACTED]

Leadership and Workplace Culture Assessment



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I. INTRODUCTION

The City of Patterson engaged Municipal Resource Group, LLC (MRG) in early 2025 to conduct a Leadership and Workplace Culture Assessment of the Patterson Fire Department (PFD). This effort followed a unanimous vote of no confidence (VONC) by IAFF Local 4577 (Union), which had been shared privately with City leadership and then later made public (*ATTACHMENT 1*). The project goals were to better understand the root causes of internal tension, assess the validity of concerns raised, and identify constructive ways to improve leadership performance, labor relations, and department culture.

This summary report offers a synthesis of MRG’s methodology, key insights, and professional observations. It is intended to inform City leaders and departmental stakeholders, including the Union, about systemic challenges while framing realistic opportunities for growth. MRG believes this summary report is suitable for broad distribution¹.

While the Union has raised concerns regarding the conduct and style of the Fire Chief, the information gathered also points to broader historical and organizational challenges. Ultimately, this is not a story about a single individual or group—but rather a department that stands at a crossroads. PFD has the potential to strengthen its leadership, clarify its identity, and build a healthier culture—if all parties are willing to reflect, reset, and recommit.

II. METHODOLOGY

MRG developed a structured questionnaire (*ATTACHMENT 2*) to guide employee interviews consistently throughout the process. The questionnaire was designed to break down communication barriers, gather narrative-style facts, and collect actionable data. To achieve this, structured (Likert Scale) questions were combined with less structured, open-ended questions. MRG’s thematic analysis ensured multiple employees provided consistent information before it could be considered a “theme.” Unless otherwise noted, more than a single source is used to support representations and consultant findings in this report.

In addition to interviews, the assessment includes a review of relevant documents (primarily emails), websites (IAFF 4577 and City), and local news stories. Many of these materials were from interviewees, IAFF 4577 leaders, or City officials, and were typically offered (or requested) to support important assertions.

Conflicting Information: As expected, there were differing opinions or representations about how employees experience the organizational culture. The specifics of contradictory information are described in the report to ensure maximum transparency.

¹ Prior to distribution, the City should conduct its own review to determine if redactions are needed to comply with privacy laws.

Forward-Looking: The primary perspective of this analysis is to gather and use quality information from the interviews to make future improvements within the Fire Department. While it is necessary to ensure an accurate understanding of past events, this report is not to provide “gotcha” material or support a discipline process. The forward-looking perspective offers the hope of new opportunities, workplace support, training/coaching, and improved work-life experience.

Data Security: Due to the sensitive nature of the process, interviewees were assured their names and attributed quotes would not be used in the report. To the extent legally available, upon completion of the report, MRG will delete/destroy notes used in its preparation. Further, no MRG-developed materials containing names or attributed quotes will be shared with anyone unless ordered to do so by a court or legally-required process.

Levels of Agreement: This report generally utilizes the following terminology to represent various levels of agreement with the questions posed:

Universal Agreement	“all participants,” “every respondent,” or “unanimously.”
Strong Majority Agreement	“most participants,” “the majority of respondents,” or “a significant number of interviewees.”
Moderate Agreement	“many participants,” “several respondents,” or “a considerable number of interviewees.”
Some agree with	“some participants” or “several respondents.”
Limited Agreement	“a minority of participants,” “a small number of respondents,” or “a few interviewees.”
Rare Agreement	“one participant,” “a single respondent,” or “an isolated interviewee.”

Validity: In this report, for an issue, concern, or complaint to be determined “valid,” it must meet each of the following criteria:

1. The available information must adequately support a belief the issue is true; *and*
2. The issue constitutes clear wrongdoing, is professionally irresponsible, or demonstrates serious leadership incompetence.

Relevance: To be determined “relevant” the issue, concern, or complaint must meet both of the following:

1. Be primarily attributable to the Fire Chief while he served in this capacity; *and*
2. Be within the Union’s legitimate area of responsibility which is typically related to: adherence to the agreement between the City and the Union, firefighter

safety, issues which are legally required, or, the effective functioning of the department.

Mutual Exclusion: In cases where an item is found *not valid*, it cannot be *relevant* – and similarly, items that are *not relevant* cannot be *valid*. This principal is grounded in the logic of the VONC: it is inappropriate to support such a serious action without *both* validity and relevance. For example:

It would be unjustified to support the VONC with an item that is:

Factually incorrect or that fails to constitute clear misconduct (not valid), even if it is attributable to the Fire Chief and is legitimately within the Union’s area of responsibility (relevant).

Likewise, it is improper to justify the VONC with a complaint that is:

Factually accurate and indicative of serious leadership incompetence (valid), but not primarily attributable to the Fire Chief *or* not within the Union’s legitimate area of responsibility (not relevant).

III. ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORY AND STRUCTURAL DYNAMICS

The City of Patterson Fire Department was a volunteer-only agency from its founding in 1935 until transitioning to a fully paid, professional department between 2005 and 2008. Despite this operational shift, cultural remnants of the volunteer era remain deeply embedded. Prior Fire Chiefs were not considered transformative leaders and often maintained a relaxed, consensus-based environment. This contributed to a workplace culture where union preferences were frequently deferred to and formal expectations were inconsistently applied.

The PFD’s current structure reflects a joint operational model with the West Stanislaus Fire Protection District (WSFPD), which serves a broader rural area with mostly volunteer personnel. The Fire Chief is responsible for both entities, and WSFPD funds 40% of six leadership and administrative positions (approx. \$550K/year). While emergency coordination between the City and WSFPD is generally professional, tensions exist regarding perceived favoritism, workload balance, and cultural priorities. The Fire Chief’s dual accountability has at times complicated labor relations with Union.

IV. WORKPLACE CULTURE AND INTERNAL RELATIONSHIPS

Interview and survey data revealed a department with strong interpersonal bonds among peers but marked by distrust, fractured leadership alignment, and inconsistent standards. Most employees expressed pride in their work and loyalty to their immediate teams, but significant

breakdowns were reported in cross-level trust—especially between field personnel and the Fire Chief.

The relationship between the Fire Chief and one Division Chief was scored very low by nearly all interviewees. While administrative staff expressed strong support for the Chief, sworn personnel returned uniformly low leadership ratings, suggesting a disconnect between operational and administrative perceptions.

A recurring theme emerged as demonstrated by complaints involving minor but symbolic matters—such as refrigerator approvals, station maintenance, and equipment placement decisions—that, in isolation, might seem insignificant. However, these examples often reflected deeper frustrations about communication, transparency, and leadership tone.

V. LABOR-MANAGEMENT RELATIONS AND UNION DYNAMICS

Local 4577 plays a prominent and historically influential role within the department. Interviews with former City leaders and ex-PFD personnel described a long-standing pattern of union overreach, with prior Fire Chiefs acquiescing to union demands at the expense of organizational development. While the union has every right to advocate for its members, its operational entanglement has sometimes blurred appropriate boundaries between labor and management.

The Union’s list of 88 reasons supporting its vote of no confidence reflected a comprehensive but, in some respects, overreaching approach (*ATTACHMENT 3*). MRG determined that many of the items were either outside the Fire Chief’s span of control, predated his appointment, or concerned matters more appropriately attributed to other City departments. That said, a small number of issues—particularly related to the meet and confer process—were found to be valid and relevant. The cumulative effect of the list, while politically impactful, diluted the strength of the union’s core arguments.

To its credit, the Union administered the VONC process professionally and without internal coercion. Members were permitted to vote freely, and the City responded responsibly by initiating this assessment process. The current opportunity, then, is not simply to re-litigate the VONC, but to reset the tone and function of labor-management engagement.

VI. LEADERSHIP CLIMATE AND STYLE

The Fire Chief was described by supporters as organized, policy-oriented, and committed to professionalizing the department. Critics, however, viewed him as rigid, overly formal, and slow to build interpersonal trust. The transition from a “friendly but passive” leadership model to a more structured, performance-driven style was jarring for many. The timing of the transition—coinciding with the retirement of a long-tenured City Manager and the appointment of a new one—contributed to misalignment and strained expectations.

The Chief's efforts to implement policies, training standards, and operational goals were not inconsistent with modern fire service practices, but in several cases, these changes were introduced without adequate discussion or explanation to staff or the Union. The Union raised legitimate concerns about failure to meet procedural expectations under the meet and confer obligation, particularly in relation to training hours, response times, and video camera installations. These procedural missteps became flashpoints for broader discontent, even when the underlying policies were operationally justified.

It is clear that the Fire Chief will need to invest in developing his leadership skills if he remains in his role. This includes demonstrating empathy, proactively engaging with dissenting views, trusting others to make decisions on minor issues, and recognizing the importance of trust-building—even when operational authority is not in question.

Review with previous PFD employees, former City Manager, and former Director of HR

To help assess workplace culture from a historical perspective, MRG initiated contact with the previous City Manager, previous HR Director, and 3 former PFD employees (two Captains and a Division Chief). All of the former PFD employees had experiences with Patterson as well as other fire agencies.

Among the former PFD employees, a unanimous theme emerged describing the PFD Union as having too much control. They explained how the Union had too much influence with the former Fire Chief who would initially agree with the need to make changes to improve professionalism but then back away as soon as the Union said, “no.” All of these interviewees described overreaching Union control as unhealthy and harmful to positive advancements in the organization.

The “strong Union” model was also identified as a problem by the former City Manager and former HR Director. The City Manager explained how when he was newly appointed, the Union pressured him and elected officials to select the former Fire Chief. He went along with this but later regretted doing so because the Fire Chief, while a nice person, did little to improve the organization, acquiesced to virtually all Union demands, and was ultimately criticized for holding back the PFD by both Union and non-Union employees. The former HR Director described a reasonable if not friendly relationship with the Union President, but went on to explain how, on many occasions, he would inject himself into management matters and had to be cautioned to “step back.” She added that the Union always challenged management and Human Resources, describing the Union as has having “blurred boundaries.”

VII. INTERNAL ALIGNMENT AND THE ROLE OF MID-LEVEL LEADERS

In several interviews, it became apparent that Division Chiefs have not consistently reinforced executive decisions or provided clear leadership alignment. In some instances, Division Chiefs were described as distancing themselves from controversial decisions by attributing them to the

Fire Chief. While they are at-will managers and not union-represented, their loyalty and cohesion as a leadership team are essential to department stability.

At the same time, the Fire Chief bears responsibility for fostering a trusting, inclusive relationship with his direct reports. Several examples in the data suggest that clearer delegation, improved trust, better communication, and shared goal-setting could help unify the command structure. MRG recommends establishing a “Leadership Compact” to reinforce mutual accountability and reinforce a shared vision (*Recommendation 9*).

VIII. RELATIONSHIP WITH WSFPD AND BROADER STAKEHOLDERS

While tensions between City personnel and WSFPD volunteers were not a central focus of the VONC, they surfaced repeatedly in interviews and in the Union’s list of 88 items. Nearly fifteen percent (15%) of the Union’s concerns referenced the Fire Chief’s perceived alignment with WSFPD interests (items 24, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33, 36, 39, 40, 58, 80, 83, and 84). The visible support from WSFPD volunteers at a Patterson City Council meeting in March of 2025 exacerbated this situation.

This dual-agency structure, while operationally sound in emergencies, complicates perceptions of fairness and priority-setting. Mutual understanding could be improved by formalizing expectations, aligning service levels, and establishing clearer boundaries around cost-sharing and resource allocation.

The use of shared resources (vehicles, personnel, and funding) should be grounded in data and transparency. A transition from cost-based sharing to a service-level agreement model could improve accountability and reduce suspicion (*Recommendation 2*).

IX. RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE PFD

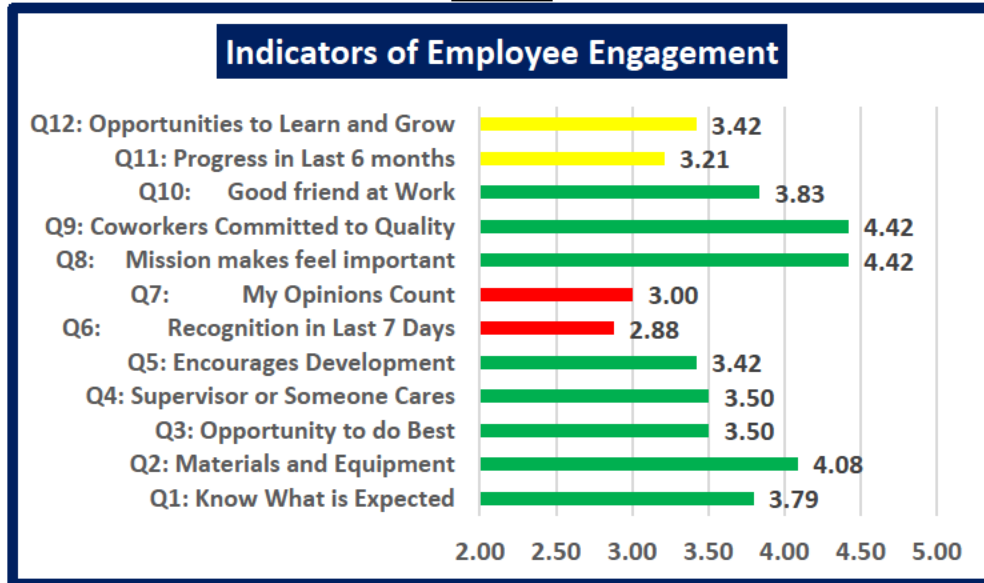
PFD Employee engagement and satisfaction

To gauge the satisfaction and engagement levels, MRG utilized an adapted version of Gallup’s Q12® Meta-Analysis, which consists of twelve engagement elements. These questions revolve around four key areas: (1) basic needs; (2) individual contribution; (3) teamwork; and (4) growth. The responses are rated on a 5-point scale, with 5 indicating “Extremely Satisfied” and 1 indicating “Extremely Dissatisfied.”

MRG used Likert-scale questions for four specific areas in the diagnostic. One related to levels of employee engagement and satisfaction, the second explored the nature of certain relationships within the PFD, the third focused on the legitimacy of the Union’s VONC, and the fourth on the Fire Chief’s leadership of the PFD. The results and findings are important factors in understanding the current culture, group dynamics, and leadership implications.

The purpose of these questions was to provide quantitative data that can help leaders enhance performance outcomes, focus on areas with the most impact on culture and engage in motivational discussions with employees. Chart A displays the average score for each question.

Chart A



Note: Questions 1-2 correlate to employees’ basic needs; questions 3-6 to individual contribution; 7-10 to teamwork; and 11-12 to growth. Questions are abbreviated for purposes of this table. Full questions can be viewed in ATTACHMENT 2.

Findings

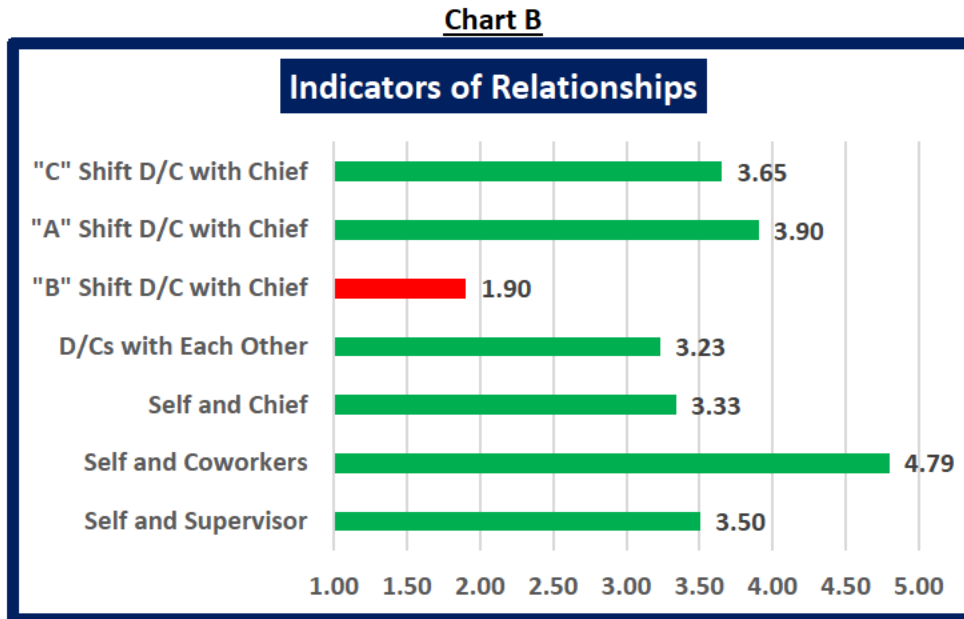
- The 8 highest scores, displayed in green, are highlights and should be recognized.
- The 4 lowest scoring areas for Q5, Q6, Q7, and Q11, displayed in red and yellow, help identify areas on which leaders should focus attention.

The overall results are favorable with indications of an *average-to-good* level of employee satisfaction and engagement. As represented in Q5, Q6, Q7 and Q11, it is important for leaders (Division Chiefs and Captains) to take a more active role in providing training and development opportunities as well as recognizing progress (*Recommendation 7*).

Relationships within the PFD

Interviewees were asked: “How do the following people get along with each other?” There were 7 descriptions of the various relationships within the workplace. The ratings for each relationship are on a 5-point scale with 5 meaning “*Gets Along Great*”, and 1 meaning “*Doesn’t Get Along at All*”. Respondents could also respond with “*Don’t Know*.”

Chart B indicates the average for each question:



Findings

- The highest rating (4.79) represents participants' perception of how interviewees get along with their coworkers. This reflects a *favorable team environment*.
- The lowest rating (1.90) shows the *most unhealthful relationship* between the Fire Chief and "B" shift Division Chief. Importantly, virtually all interviewees indicated there is a problem.
- The other 6 measures are in the "normal" range

The most obvious problem regarding internal relationships is between the Fire Chief and the "B" shift Division Chief. Decisive action should be taken to remedy this problem due to its significant ramifications for culture and morale (*Recommendation 8*).

Vote of No Confidence

As part of the interview process, MRG sought to learn about the validity and accuracy of the VONC. To achieve this, we asked for interviewees who are also Union members to rate their experience as it pertains to the VONC process from 1 to 5.

Chart C shows the results.

Chart C

Perceptions of the VONC	
<i>I had sufficient information to form an opinion about the issues that led to the VONC</i>	4.67
<i>I believe the concerns raised in the VONC were valid and accurate</i>	4.83
<i>There was pressure from peers or union leadership to support the VONC</i>	1.17
<i>I believe the VONC process was handled in a transparent and democratic manner</i>	5
<i>The VONC has had a positive impact</i>	3

Findings

- The VONC process was administered professionally and without inappropriate internal pressure.
- The score of “3” for whether the VONC has had a “positive impact” is not surprising. Most interviewees commented that the outcome of the VONC has yet to be determined, but added that they were happy that the City was taking the matter seriously by undergoing a thorough review.

Fire Chief Performance

As part of this leadership and workplace culture assessment, a 25-item survey was administered to 6 Captains, 3 Division Chiefs, and 3 non-sworn staff (*ATTACHMENT 2*). The purpose of the survey was to evaluate the Fire Chief’s performance across five core leadership domains: (1) Leadership & Decision-Making, (2) Communication & Transparency, (3) Workplace Culture & Morale, (4) Fairness & Integrity, and (5) Conflict Resolution & Problem Solving.

Sworn Personnel Feedback: The sworn group, those who lead the daily operations of the department, returned *consistently low scores for the Fire Chief*, averaging 1.86 overall on a 5-point scale. These results may suggest a “union groupthink” bias which sometimes occurs in smaller agencies where members spend a lot of “downtime” together.

Non-Sworn Personnel Feedback: In sharp contrast, the three non-sworn respondents provided perfect scores across all categories which lifts the overall total average to 2.65. While these results appear to reflect strong support for the Chief among administrative or support staff, the uniformity of the perfect scores is atypical and may suggest either a highly positive bias or a differing basis for evaluating leadership (*the Fire Chief’s administrative effectiveness vs. field leadership*).

The disparity between sworn and non-sworn ratings indicates a *significant* disconnect in how the Chief is perceived by those in operational roles compared to those in more administrative proximity. This divide is consistent with qualitative themes expressed elsewhere in the assessment, including strained labor-management relations, trust deficits, and skepticism regarding internal communication and morale.

Chart D—Fire Chief Evaluation

Sworn Averages Per Section	
Section 1: Leadership & Decision-Making	1.71
Section 2: Communication & Transparency	1.83
Section 3: Workplace Culture & Morale	1.71
Section 4: Fairness and Integrity	2.22
Section 5: Conflict Resolution & Problem Solving	1.82
OVERALL	1.86
Total Averages Per Section	
Section 1: Leadership & Decision-Making	2.53
Section 2: Communication & Transparency	2.63
Section 3: Workplace Culture & Morale	2.53
Section 4: Fairness and Integrity	2.92
Section 5: Conflict Resolution & Problem Solving	2.62
OVERALL	2.65

Key Findings:

- **Sworn personnel returned uniformly low scores**, with an overall average of 1.86 out of 5, indicating significant dissatisfaction with the Fire Chief’s performance in leadership, morale, communication, and conflict resolution domains.
- **Non-sworn personnel gave perfect scores (5.00 in every category)**, suggesting strong support among administrative or support staff—but this also raises questions about uniformity and possible role-based differences in expectations.
- **The largest gaps between sworn and non-sworn evaluations** occurred in the areas of Leadership & Decision-Making and Workplace Culture & Morale, both of which scored just 1.71 among sworn personnel.
- **Fairness & Integrity received the highest scores from sworn staff (2.22)**, suggesting that while concerns exist, some elements of consistent or principled behavior may still be recognized. Some respondents use of slightly higher scores indicates their truthfulness and openness.

- **The sharp divide in perceptions underscores a fractured organizational experience**, with field personnel and administrative staff viewing the Chief’s performance through fundamentally different lenses.
- **The current leadership climate reflects a high level of operational distrust**, which may undermine the Chief’s ability to lead effectively *unless significant relational repair and cultural rebuilding occur*.

X. 88 UNION ISSUES, ANALYSIS, AND COMMENTS

IAFF 4577—Reasons for the Vote of No Confidence

This section addresses the 88 items described as the reason for the vote of no confidence (VONC). Here, MRG assessed each item within the broader framework of leadership expectations and organizational responsibilities. Analysis and comments follow the Union’s introductory description with a concluding statement as to the item’s validity and relevance.

The Union described the first 5 items as relating to a PERB charge (*ATTACHMENT 4*). 4 items on the list represent *serious issues* which could be considered leadership malfeasance. *The 5 items listed by the Union as being related to the PERB charge were prioritized for a more thorough analysis* and are detailed in this section of the report.

84 items, based on the Union’s description, are categorized as follows:

- (1) Relating to the PFD—WSFPD relationship
- (2) Pertaining to another City entity*
- (3) Items considered minor or normally within the Fire Chief’s prerogative
- (4) Event occurs before or not related to conduct “as the PFD Fire Chief”
- (5) Beyond the Fire Chief’s control
- (6) Duplicate items

The analysis for these items was included in MRG’s analysis but not individually covered in this report.

* For example: Mayor, City Manager, Division Chief, Human Resources, Finance, or Engineering

CHART F — ITEMS BY CATEGORY

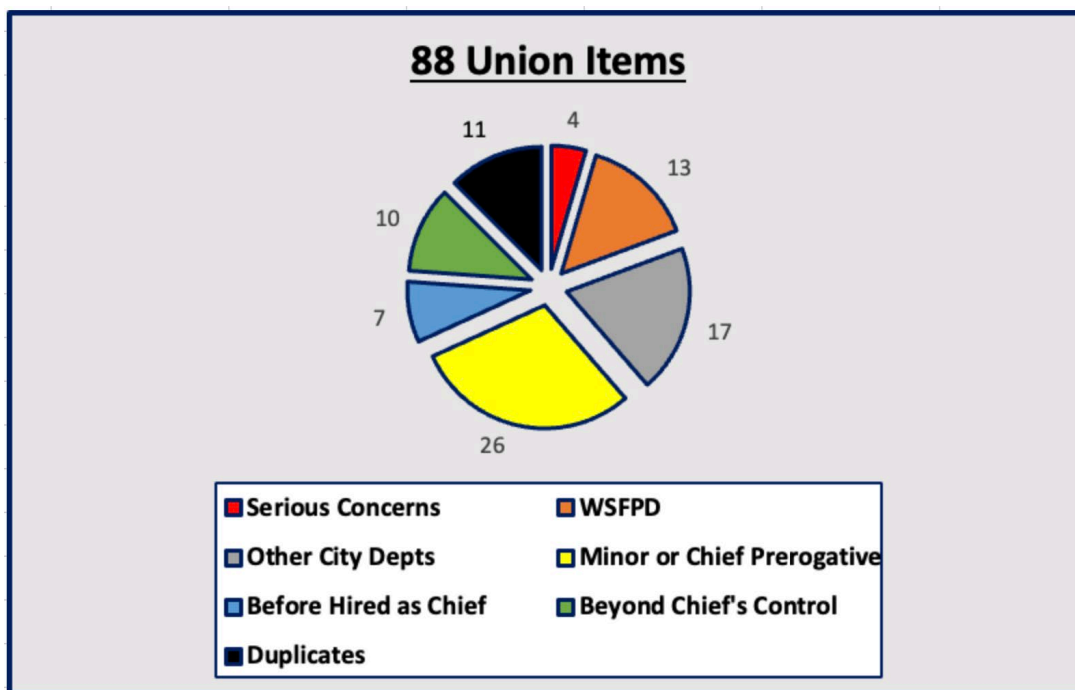


Chart F identifies the category for each item. We acknowledge that some items could be viewed as belonging to different categories. For example:

- (1) items 18 and 19, pertaining to the Fire Chief’s reputation in his former department or as a PFD Division Chief, may be viewed as belonging in the “*serious issue*” category instead of “*before hired as chief*” category, and
- (2) item 39, relating to Union involvement in crafting a new agreement with WSFPD, could be seen as belonging in the “*minor issue or Chief’s prerogative*” category instead of the “*WSFPD*” category.

Descriptions and commentary by Union leaders give context; however, we screened out hyperbole and extraneous comments to effectively evaluate each item (*the complete description, as provided by the Union, can be seen in ATTACHMENT 3*). Further, while all items are not assessed individually, the *cumulative effect* of many similar events is important and is considered throughout this report. To categorize the items, as it specifically relates to the VONC, our approach was to evaluate as follows:

- To determine if it was serious, we asked, “*if true, does the main issue constitute clear wrongdoing, is the conduct professionally irresponsible, or does it demonstrate serious leadership incompetence on the part of the Fire Chief?*”
- To determine if the issue applies to someone other than the Fire Chief, we asked “*Who has primary responsibility for the issue?*” (*For example: another City department*)
- To find whether the issue was within the Fire Chief’s control, we asked, “*does the issue constitute something a typical Fire Chief actually has direct power to influence?*”

- To be included in the WSFPD category, the central focus needed to include facts pertaining to the WSFPD or point to how the Fire Chief interacts with WSFPD.
- To be considered “minor” or “within the Chief’s prerogative,” we asked two simple questions:
 - (1) “If it is true, is it significant?”, and/or
 - (2) “Is this an issue which would normally be within a Fire Chief’s authority?”

For reference purposes, the below table depicts the applicable category for each item.

TABLE 1²

Serious Concerns	WSFPD	Other City Depts	Fire Chief Perogative/Minor	Before Working as Fire Chief	Beyond Fire Chief's Control	Duplicates
1, 2, 3, 5	24, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33, 36, 39, 40, 58, 80, 83, 84	6, 13, 14, 20, 21, 22, 34, 35, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 48, 62, 67, 78	4, 9, 12, 16, 23, 26, 27, 32, 37, 38, 50, 51, 52, 55, 56, 59, 64, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 75, 79, 85, 86	10, 11, 15, 17, 18, 19, 82	8, 25, 41, 47, 53, 54, 63, 65, 68, 74	7, 49, 57, 60, 61, 66, 76, 77, 81, 87, 88

1. **Change to policy affecting working conditions (PERB charge) SERIOUS**

This item asserts policies were changed and the Fire Chief told the Union he did not need to meet and confer. The Union criticized grammatical errors and the policy still having references to the Fire Chief’s former department.

ANALYSIS/COMMENTS: (This item also relates to VONC items 7 and 60) This item, while described on the Union’s list to be part of the PERB charges, was *not* actually included in the PERB charge documents (ATTACHMENT 4).

Union leaders acknowledge that a *policy manual* for PFD was actually obtained through Union leadership in approximately 2021 when the former Fire Chief was still in-charge. When the current Fire Chief was hired as a Division Chief, he describes a policy manual as being physically located in each of the two Fire Stations (he was instructed to familiarize himself with policies when he was hired).

In December, 2023, as an Acting Chief, the current Fire Chief *did* implement a change to electronically track the distribution of policy in a system called Target Solutions. In this system, each employee would both have access to all PFD policies as well as acknowledging receipt of such policies. This process change, while not inclusive of new or different policy, supported normal administrative function (e.g., “going paperless” and ensuring each employee acknowledges receipt of agency policies).

The Fire Chief asserts that *changes* to the policy or *adding new policy* during his watch did not violate any meet and confer obligations because there were “no fundamental changes in working conditions.” Conversely, the Union’s view is that the policy changes included 10 specific changes to working conditions, as described in an email dated June 20, 2024.

² Duplicates: 7 (1), 49 (22), 57 (38), 60 (1), 61 (53/56), 66 (46), 76 (6), 77 (1-5), 81 (29/30/31), 87 (78), 88 (14)

Wages and working hours are very clearly understood by both the Chief and the Union to be within the meet and confer requirements of the Government Code, Title 1, Division 4, Chapter 10, Section 3505. However, the phrases “working conditions” or “other terms and conditions of employment” gives room for interpretation and differing opinions.

For “other terms and conditions of employment,” California case law serves as a guide (*Anaheim Union High School District, 1981, PERB Dec. No. 177*). The key test to determine whether or not a meet and confer process is required includes answering 3 questions:

- Is the matter logically and reasonably related to employees’ wages, hours, or working conditions?
- Is the subject of the type that has traditionally been bargained over in the public sector?
- Would the employer's need for managerial control outweigh the benefit to employee-employer relations?

If the answer to the first two questions is “yes” and the third question “no,” then meet and confer is *required*. A checklist to help clarify/evaluate these questions when issues arise may be of value (*ATTACHMENT 5*). A sage leadership philosophy successfully used by many tenured Chiefs is to operate from the perspective that leaders can *never* meet and confer *too much*.

For this item, the Union generalizes *all* policy changes by the Fire Chief included changes to working conditions. Yet, in an email dated June 20, 2024, the Union President lists 10 policies for which he believed the meet and confer process was warranted. In this report, VONC items 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 40, 51, 60, 77, 81, and 87 refer to “policy”, “rule”, “standard”, or “meet and confer.”

The point made by the Union referring to grammatical errors or references to the wrong agency in PFD policy reflects poorly on the agency but this sloppiness is less significant than questions pertaining to the legal requirement to meet and confer in good faith. In a well-functioning organization, problems such as grammar or non-applicable agency names would normally be identified and corrected without unnecessary drama. Further, the practice of adapting other agencies’ policy is not unusual. While some parts of the current policy have been implemented or altered during the current Fire Chief’s watch, substandard policy may also be a reflection work by others who were entrusted with developing and distributing policy. A review of a variety of well written emails by the Fire Chief also supports the belief that grammatical errors may not be directly attributable to the Fire Chief.

VALIDITY/RELEVANCE:

(1) Mishandling of meet and confer process: **valid and relevant**

(2) Grammar and misidentifying the agency errors: **not valid, not relevant**

Note: The Analysis/Comments for item 1 applies to several of the enumerated items — especially those listed as PERB charges (items 1 through 5) or when the Union expresses concern about decisions being made without their involvement.

2.

Requirement for 2 hours of “outside” training (PERB charge)

SERIOUS

The Union claims the Fire Chief lied and arbitrarily used ISO rating as a reason to support this requirement. Further, the Union believes changes to training are subject to the meet and confer process.

ANALYSIS/COMMENTS: The Fire Chief initiated a requirement for 2 hours of “manipulative” training per work day in early June, 2024. According to the Fire Chief, the basis for this decision was to ensure the PFD would be able to maintain its current “class 2” Insurance Service Office (ISO) rating and have records to prove the training occurred during an upcoming 5-year review. Other reasons given by the Fire Chief, in a July 5, 2024, email, included meeting National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), standard 1001 (firefighter professional qualifications), and to improve services for the community.

The Chief and Union disagree as to how this requirement was communicated. The Union explained there was an email from the Fire Chief requiring “outside” training (attempts to locate this email, were unsuccessful). The Chief indicates he provided verbal instructions to the Division Chiefs to conduct two hours of “manipulative” training per day. Further, it was discussed in a June 5th labor management meeting.

As reported by Union officials, the concern with “outside” training is that the Fire Chief gives no consideration to firefighter’s exposure to extreme weather conditions. Further, they explain that the added training requirement is not needed because other normally-occurring activities such as checking hydrants and routine readiness procedures ensures the PFD would meet ISO requirements without the added 2-hour burden.

A lengthy email exchange between the Fire Chief and Union President (June/July 2024) provides some clarity. This exchange highlights some key details:

- The term “outside” is not used by the Fire Chief—instead, he used “manipulative” training and tried explaining a misunderstanding.
- The exchange, while including several topics, mostly focuses on the responsibility to meet and confer.
- The Fire Chief expresses how a previous labor management meeting (occurring with the Division Chiefs on June 5, 2024) may have met the obligation to meet and confer on some items.
- The Union expresses a desire to meet and confer on 4 enumerated items and the Fire Chief retorts that there’s no need for meet and confer because the 4 enumerated items are “not fundamental to working conditions and/or a change to hours, wages, or terms of employment.”
- The Chief also sets an unreceptive tone about meet and confer requirements by writing (on June 24, 2024):

It appears that there is a level of expectation that we are to meet and confer before directing personnel to perform ordinary tasks that are within industry standards and are a normal part of a career fire agency. We are committed to meeting and conferring on items where a change in working conditions exists or where a new process and/or policy is created,

but there should also be a level of understanding that every decision we make or directive we give, doesn't necessarily meet the "smell test" for meet and confer.

The key issue for this item seems to be a requirement for PFD members to undertake training. While the Union expresses support for training, it is also apparent they have resisted this change in support of a more lenient and less controlled workday.

A question arises from this issue: *Is it reasonable and within the Fire Chief's authority to impose 2 hours of manipulative training per day for the aforementioned reasons?* Virtually all leaders in the fire industry would say the answer to this is "yes." To some extent, it is plausible that the Union would also not be in opposition to this statement (as expressed to MRG during two different meetings). Thus, it seems that the issue really does not center on the training requirement itself but rather on how the Fire Chief implemented this requirement (*see meet and confer requirements as outlined in item 1*). The specific language, as communicated in the Union's PERB charge supports this contention:

In early June 2024, the City implemented training requirements for Union-represented employees whereby Union-represented employees are now required to engage in outside manipulative training for at least two (2) hours each day and are required to perform 192 hours of proficiency training each year. The City did not provide any notice of this change to the Union prior to implementing this change. Prior to early June 2024, the City did not have any training requirements or standards or time requirements for training, rather, training would occur sporadically and at the Fire Captain's discretion.

As for the assertion that the Fire Chief "lied," the Union's perspective rests on the idea that the Chief wanted to divert responsibility to the ISO for the imposition of 2 hours per day of documented "manipulative" training (to meet a 192-hour requirement).

While communication shortfalls and misunderstandings happen all the time, the clear, written communication by the Fire Chief, as reflected in his email dated July 5, 2024, indicates at least 3 concurrent reasons for the requirement: (1) ISO, (2) NFPA Standard 1001, and (3) improved service to the community. MRG notes that this communication occurred before the VONC (August, 2024), before the PERB charge was filed (November, 2024), and before the list of reasons for the VONC was provided by the Union to the City (March, 2025).

VALIDITY/RELEVANCE:

- (1) For meet and confer process: **valid and relevant**
- (2) For Fire Chief lying: **(see Section VIII—Mistrust)**

This item was included as part of a PERB charge filed months after the VONC (PERB filed November 7, 2024). This was resolved by an agreement between the City and the Union and charges were withdrawn by the Union on December 19, 2024 (*ATTACHMENT 4*).

3. **Unreasonable response time improvements required (PERB charge)** **SERIOUS**

This claim includes that a reaction time requirement was implemented on May 16, 2024. Further, it was enacted without talking with the Union and the Fire Chief said he had no need to get Union input. According to the Union, the Chief also did not factor in "layout" or sleep times and referred

to NFPA standards to justify this requirement. Lastly, the Fire Chief is allegedly selective about which NFPA standards are followed.

ANALYSIS/COMMENTS: Similar to items 1 and 2, this item focuses on the Chief's handling of the meet and confer process. This was also included in the PERB charge (*ATTACHMENT 4*).

On May 16, 2024, the Fire Chief initiated a process to improve response times. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. Not approving of this lengthy response time, and pointing to a 1 minute and 20 second NFPA standard (NFPA 1710), the Fire Chief expressed a target for the crew to be suited up and in the apparatus within 1 minute and 20 seconds. Later, the Fire Chief added 10 seconds, changing the goal to 1 minute and 30 seconds as a result of a dialogue with the Union (1:30 also matches other regional agencies' reaction time target).

The Union's PERB complaint reads in part:

Prior to May 16, 2024, the City did not have any response time requirements or reaction time requirements, nor was the City regularly monitoring or evaluating response times and reaction times.

If this statement is true, this would be a serious concern for any emergency response leader, in fact, to *not* track response or reaction times could be interpreted as previous PFD leaders' negligence. Clearly, establishing goals and monitoring response time performance is a *normal function* for first responder agency leaders.

As similarly described in item 2, MRG does not think the Union is opposed to providing high-level service to the community. At issue is the Fire Chief's method of making changes or imposing new requirements. It is noteworthy to mention that since this change, response times have improved markedly and no PFD employees have been disciplined as a result of creating the response time goal of 1 minute and 30 seconds.

Given the unacceptably slow response to a fire, establishing a response time goal could have *normally* been communicated without a meet and confer process. This is because (1) the Fire Chief's need to act quickly and unilaterally *outweighs* the bargaining obligation. Further, (2) a compelling operational necessity exists to immediately correct obviously impaired public services. However, in this situation, the Chief did not act quickly, instead, he took more than a month after the precipitating incident. This delay reflects time that could have been used to conduct a meet and confer process.

As it relates to the Union's assertion that the Fire Chief did not factor in "layout" or sleep time, the Fire Chief indicates that he did give this issue consideration. During a meeting with MRG, he explained how the target of 1 minute and 30 seconds reflects an average of all responses so faster daytime responses will off-set longer nighttime responses.

The Union's assertion that the Fire Chief complies with some NFPA standards and does not comply with others is vague. There are over 300 NFPA standards and many are not applicable, not practical, or are cost-prohibitive for some agencies. It should be noted that the NFPA, like the ISO, is not a government entity and does not have legally-binding authority. Fire Chiefs typically use materials from the NFPA to minimize civil liability/legal exposure and measure departmental performance against industry standards. It is not unusual for a Fire Chief to be selective in this way.

This item was included as part of a PERB charge filed months after the August VONC (filed with PERB on November 7, 2024). This issue was ultimately resolved by an agreement between the City and the Union and charges were withdrawn by the Union on December 19, 2024 (ATTACHMENT 4).

VALIDITY/RELEVANCE:

- (1) For meet and confer concerns: **valid and relevant**
- (2) For consideration of “layout” or sleep times: **not valid, not relevant**
- (3) For Chief not following some NFPA standards: **not valid, not relevant**

4. **Changes to hydrant testing process (PERB charge) MINOR**

For this item, “Chiefs” were said to lie about the City influencing or guiding new rules and procedures for Fire Department personnel. Further, the “Chiefs” made a crew do “70 plus” hydrants in one morning, causing a brown water situation within the City’s water distribution system. Lastly, the Union explains how the new process was completely different than how it has been done for 20 years and the City should have included them in the process of developing a new process.

ANALYSIS/COMMENTS: In this situation, the Union describes this as being included in the PERB charge; however, the document, as filed with PERB, does not include any elements pertaining to flow testing hydrants (ATTACHMENT 4).

The Union’s description of this issue does not specifically link the *Fire Chief’s* actions to this event. The Fire Chief indicated that a Division Chief was assigned to work with the City to coordinate the hydrant process. When this was complete, there was actually less work for PFD personnel to complete (e.g., they discontinued work on “street valves”).

As it relates to *lies* about the City imposing changes to the hydrant process: Sometimes those in leadership roles provide excuses for making changes. In short, instead of just saying what the leader expects, they weakly point to some other authority as the reason for a change (most often blaming someone of higher rank in the organization). Sometimes leaders provide several reasons for change (as previously described with item 3 concerning response time). While it is normally an excellent leadership practice to explain *why* something is changed or required, unless the reason is strongly supported in fact, there is risk an inaccuracy will cast doubt about the leader’s character. In this case, the allegation that “Chiefs” lied is non-specific.

Regarding the “Chiefs” making a crew complete “70 plus” hydrants in one day and causing a “brown water” situation: information was shared suggesting [REDACTED] made this decision for his crew, resulting in the crew completing the process improperly, and that [REDACTED]

Relating to the process being unchanged for 20 years and asking for Union guidance: Institutional knowledge is valuable and wise leaders often leverage such experience as part of a change process. However, sometimes it is necessary for those in leadership roles to move forward when those with experience are thought to be in the way of progress. In either case, it is unclear how a change in the hydrant testing process represents a major problem (as it relates to the day-to-day work of fire crews). Clearly the matter of brown water is an important public service issue which has been addressed.

VALIDITY/RELEVANCE:

- (1) Relating to lies by “Chiefs”: **(mistrust addressed in multiple report locations)**
- (2) For 70 hydrant issue: **not valid, not relevant**
- (3) For being dismissive about 20 years’ experience: **not valid, not relevant**

5. Security camera deployment (PERB charge) SERIOUS

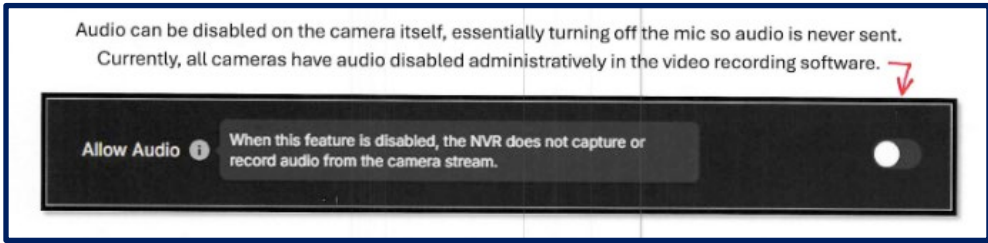
According to the Union, the Chief arranged to install security cameras at station 51 without notice and lied about the funding for the cameras. Further, cameras were installed at station 52 “knowing the Union had requested meet and confer.” A related issue was that cameras were installed at eating and leisure areas “not caring about firefighters’ personal life” and that the Chief lied about the cameras not having audio capacities.

ANALYSIS/COMMENTS: As written in the PERB charge, on June 5, 2024, the Fire Chief said he was “considering installing surveillance cameras” and the Union responded that the “Union must be notified in advance if the City decides to install surveillance cameras.” Then, a few weeks later on June 25, 2024, the City installed at least four (4) surveillance cameras at Fire Station 51. At no point prior to the installation of these surveillance cameras did the City provide any notice to the Union of its decision to install the surveillance cameras.

During an interview with the Fire Chief, he explained how there were 2 cameras which were installed previous to his tenure as the Fire Chief. He added that a 2021 email exchange between the Union President and the former Chief indicated the deployment of cameras was “okay” (the Fire Chief was a Division Chief at the time and copied on this exchange). This email, later obtained by MRG, describes only 2 cameras at Station 51 and does not support the contention that an expanded video system, as deployed in 2024, was agreeable by the Union.

The use of video security systems in or around the workplace is commonly bargained with those who represent employees. Further, even if the 2 cameras which were previously deployed in 2021 were approved or not opposed by the Union, this does not necessarily extend to a significantly expanded video system in 2024. In short, a meet and confer process should have occurred.

The funding source and claims the Fire Chief lied about this seems unrealistic, unimportant, and irrelevant. However, lying about audio capacity could be a serious issue if people in the fire station believe they have a right to privacy. MRG has secured assurances from City Information Technology (IT) personnel that the audio function of the camera system is not enabled and only IT personnel can change the camera settings (see below screen shot and note from IT personnel):



VALIDITY/RELEVANCE:

- (1) For meet and confer concerns: **valid and relevant**
- (2) Relating to lies by the Fire Chief: **(mistrust addressed in multiple report locations)**

XI. ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

Finding 1: The Fire Chief has not consistently satisfied meet and confer requirements, particularly relating to policy changes. While the PERB complaint was ultimately resolved and the Union was provided the opportunity to represent its members, the obligation to initiate meet and confer discussions should be shared by both the City and the Union. Failing to follow proper process—even once—is serious and undermines trust (*Recommendation 1*).

Finding 2: The Fire Chief could have approached change implementation with greater sensitivity and strategic pacing. Transitioning from a disengaged leadership culture to a performance-oriented model is inherently difficult. This burden was compounded by the retirement of the tenured City Manager shortly after the Fire Chief's appointment. The newly hired City Manager, undoubtedly busy with learning his new job, probably left a leadership vacuum and contributed to worsening relationships between the Fire Chief and Union leadership.

Finding 3: The Union's administration of the Vote of No Confidence was professional and free from undue internal pressure. Interview feedback and survey results support the conclusion that members were permitted to vote without coercion (*see Section VI, Chart C*).

Finding 4: The Union's listing of 88 items was excessive and included many items which were not fair to include (for example: before his tenure as the Fire Chief, and items outside of his span of control). While we recognize how some items were intended to illustrate themes of mistrust or character concerns, their inclusion ultimately weakened the overall credibility of the VONC.

Finding 5: The current structural relationship between the City of Patterson and the WSFPD is flawed, especially as it relates to how Division Chiefs are funded. A service agreement model where specific services are provided to WSFPD would be more easily explained and justified by supporting data.

Finding 6: Many of the Union's criticisms regarding WSFPD reflect a lack of perspective on the role of volunteers in the fire service. While the Fire Chief should exercise consistency to avoid perceptions of favoritism, Union leaders may benefit from showing greater compassion and appreciation for the contributions of WSFPD volunteers and board members who support the community without significant remuneration. Constructive engagement, rather than adversarial positioning, could yield mutual benefit.

Finding 7: The Union's power dynamic and level of influence has far exceeded "normal" for many years. Prior City leaders, to include the previous Fire Chief and to some extent current Division Chiefs, have ceded power and in so doing have allowed the situation to become unhealthful.

Finding 8: The Fire Chief and Union leaders have devoted disproportionate attention to minor matters (examples include: lights/TV on, uniforms, BBQs, Sheriff's deputies using showers, background of engine photo featuring "West Stanislaus" and not "Patterson," volunteers with beards, station tours, and logos on a podium). When faced with minor issues, effective leaders ask themselves, "is this really important" or "do I want our employees to believe this is really important to me (or us)."

Finding 9: The highly deteriorated relationship between the Fire Chief and Union members requires both sides to "own their part" and move beyond the win-lose perspective. If either side disagrees or lacks the will, all involved will remain stuck in a cycle of conflict.

Finding 10: The Division Chiefs, while unrepresented and at-will, have at times failed to exhibit consistent leadership alignment. Effective leadership requires them to support executive decisions clearly and constructively. The Fire Chief should delegate more effectively and foster trust, while Division Chiefs must

avoid distancing themselves from leadership choices by blaming or deflecting to the Fire Chief when an issue is unpopular.

Finding 11: The Grievance procedure, outlined in Section 16 of the MOU is structurally unsound, especially as it relates to skipping obviously unnecessary steps. While the Fire Chief and Union leaders have made practical adjustments in past examples, the MOU should describe a clear and consistent process.

XII. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are intended as a starting point for City leaders' consideration. This assessment was not a formal investigation nor a comprehensive audit of the organization or workload assessment. Accordingly, each recommendation should be reviewed through a thoughtful lens, with recognition that internal stakeholders may wish to adapt, expand, or discard suggestions based on their own insights and operational realities.

These recommendations are not meant to be exhaustive, but rather to prompt constructive internal discussion and support decision-making around leadership development, structural alignment, and cultural improvement.

It is important to recognize that organizational culture does not change overnight. Shifting beliefs, behaviors, and interpersonal norms takes time and deliberate effort. MRG believes that the PFD has the capacity to evolve and improve. Real progress will require each employee—regardless of role or rank—to take personal responsibility for contributing to a healthier, more respectful, and more effective workplace.

Recommendation 1: Develop and adopt a formal *Meet and Confer Policy*. In collaboration, the Fire Chief, Human Resources, and Union representatives should meet for this process. MRG has prepared a sample policy and decision checklist for consideration (*see ATTACHMENTS 5 and 6*). This policy could be integrated into leadership onboarding and supervisory training. Resolving meet and confer obligations proactively will help avoid costly misunderstandings and improve labor relations.

→ Supports Finding 1

Recommendation 2: Transition from the current cost-sharing model to a *Service Agreement Model* with WSFPD. The agreement should clearly define services provided by the City to WSFPD and include an annual reconciliation ("true-up") to assess actual costs. This will ensure transparency, accountability, and fiscal fairness for both agencies.

→ Supports Finding 5

Recommendation 3: Provide the Fire Chief with an intensive, facilitated *executive coaching and simulation-based leadership training program*. The two-day session should include role-play scenarios involving labor tension, policy communication, and change management. The goal is to improve emotional intelligence, union engagement strategy, and leadership presence.

→ Supports Findings 2, 9, and 10

Recommendation 4: Offer Union leadership the opportunity to participate in a structured debrief and collaborative reset session based on this report. If mutually agreed upon, include the Fire Chief and/or City Manager. Lasting one day, this session should focus on clarifying roles, rebuilding trust, and establishing boundaries to support a healthier organizational culture.

→ Supports Findings 4, 6, 7, and 9

Recommendation 5: The City Manager and Fire Chief should jointly define a set of high-level performance expectations (5–10 measurable outcomes) with a particular focus on labor-management relations, internal communication, and leadership delegation. These should be tracked and discussed during periodic performance reviews.

→ Supports Findings 2 and 10

Recommendation 6: Encourage the Fire Chief to proactively follow up on employee concerns involving other City departments (for example, HR, Engineering, Facilities, Finance), particularly when concerns pertain to working conditions. Demonstrating personal involvement, even when the matter is outside the Chief's direct control, will signal leadership presence and respect.

→ Supports Finding 6 and multiple VONC items concerning station maintenance and support services

Recommendation 7: Expand leadership efforts in employee development, recognition, and training opportunities. As indicated in Chart A (Q6, Q7, Q11, Q12), personnel would benefit from greater encouragement of professional growth and more consistent acknowledgment of contributions.

→ Supports Findings 2 and 8; see Section VI, Interview Data

Recommendation 8: Immediately address the unhealthy relationship between the Fire Chief and the B-Shift Division Chief. If informal efforts are unsuccessful, engage a neutral mediator to support conflict resolution and clarify expectations. Department-wide communication about improved alignment is essential.

→ Supports Findings 8, 9, and 10; see Chart B, Section VI

Recommendation 9: Establish a Leadership Alignment Compact between the Fire Chief and Division Chiefs. This short, written agreement would affirm commitment to shared expectations, unified communication, and professional solidarity. A regular check-in (e.g., quarterly) could reinforce progress and address misalignments early.

→ Supports Finding 10

Recommendation 10: Introduce conflict triage coaching for both the Fire Chief and Union leaders. This voluntary, one-on-one coaching would help key individuals shift from reactive behaviors to principled, strategic engagement—supporting the goal of rebuilding trust from both ends.

→ Supports Findings 7 and 9

Recommendation 11: Make changes in Section 16 of the MOU, Greivance Procedures, to allow for clear and consistent practices for skipping impractical steps in the grievance process. This change process is not urgent and can be addressed at the next regularly occurring negotiation cycle.

→ Supports Finding 1.

XIII. CONCLUSION

The consultants recognize the deep passion PFD employees have for their work. The information gathered during our interviews shows that a significant majority of employees are both committed to and believe strongly in their value and community. Many positive relationships within the department are present, providing a solid foundation for future improvements.

MRG is ready to continue supporting Patterson's leadership in addressing the challenges outlined in this report. Our team is available to provide the tools, resources, and expertise needed to enhance individual and team performance through coaching, training, and other necessary initiatives that will help build trust and foster a healthier organizational culture.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to all interviewees for their professionalism throughout this process. The participants were kind, courteous, forthcoming, open, and honest in sharing their experiences and perspectives, contributing greatly to the success of this assessment.

XIV. ATTACHMENTS

- ATTACHMENT 1 — Mar 18, 2025 Union Press Release on the VONC
- ATTACHMENT 2 — MRG PFD Interview Document
- ATTACHMENT 3 — Union list of reasons for the VONC (88 items)
- ATTACHMENT 4 — PERB Charge Documents
- ATTACHMENT 5 — Meet and Confer evaluation checklist
- ATTACHMENT 6 — Sample Meet and Confer Policy